

A teal-tinted photograph of an elderly man and a woman embracing. The man is in the foreground, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The woman is behind him, her face partially visible as she leans in. The overall mood is intimate and affectionate.

TRACES

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# An impetus of life

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## TRACES

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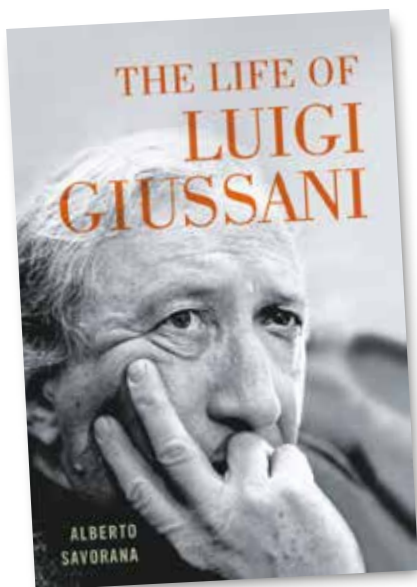
# n° 01

## February 2022



Fr. Luigi Giussani (1922-2005).

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## 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.*

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## A hundred times greater

“C hrist ‘bumped into’ my life, my life ‘bumped into’ Christ, precisely so that I should learn to understand that He is the central point of everything, of the whole of my life. *Christ is the life of my life*: in Him is summed up all that I would desire, all that I look for, all that I sacrifice, all that develops in me out of love for the persons with whom He has put me.” This issue marks the beginning of the centenary of Fr. Luigi Giussani (1922-2005). His words quoted here describe the affection that sustained his whole life, that deeply moved his reason beginning when he was a boy, that filled his heart as he walked up the steps of the Berchet High School with the desire that those young people would be able to learn a method for judging everything and being free. This affection shaped his obsession “not to live uselessly” into a fecundity toward everyone, into an *impetus of life* that was not the product of will or temperament, but of satisfaction.

“Neither structures nor organizations nor initiatives will suffice,” he said; the only thing capable of changing human beings and the world is “a different and new life.” From the consciousness of the gift that had crashed into his life, a great, complex story emerged, full of limitations and beauty, a story that reached the farthest places by unexpected roads, and, as he said in 1987, was so “not his” that it filled him with “a wonder even greater than that of the beginning itself.” A hundred times greater.

**This is why his proposal challenges our lives**, asking that each of us verify it against the hundredfold promised by Christ. It is an incessant invitation to start out from experience. Nothing could deter him from recovering Christianity, which is a present event worthy of the infallible expectant awaiting of the heart. “In a fragmented world” in which “answers are given even before the questions are asked, Giussani returns to the question,” as the apostolic nuncio in the United States, Christophe Pierre, said in the conversation that opens this issue. Giussani’s insistence on not separating reason from experience, the meaning of life from concrete existence, impacts the heart of our time, which believes in everything and nothing.

Every ideal is judged without being discounted by the passing of the years, and is invalidated or confirmed as true in a comparison with every historical situation. Giussani’s ideal either lives in the present or it does not exist. So then, how is that “different and new life” an experience today? This is the question we asked those who encountered him in the most varied of ways, some even without ever having met him in person. Throughout this year we will document what happens in the magazine and on [clonline.org](http://clonline.org) through the testimonies and contributions of everyone.

For this reason we propose again the questions Julián Carrón asked at the most recent Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of CL, which invited us to look at the centenary: “We are not interested in this celebration if not for an essential reason: to bear witness to what Fr. Giussani has generated in us. What does Fr. Giussani have to do with the many challenges we face? What does his paternity generate today?”

# Letters

## Daniele, Sebastian, Lucia, Giovanni, Ottavia

edited by  
**Paola Bergamini**  
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### Open doors

For the past year, I have been living in El Masnou, a small town twenty kilometers from Barcelona, with my wife, Ilaria, and our daughters, Camilla and Rocío, who was born in August. I received an unexpected job offer, and I remember that when I apprehensively asked my wife what I should do, she said, “For the first time, this is something we haven’t planned for ourselves, so you should go.” This answer accompanied me for the six months we lived apart; it was a witness that someone who lives the Christian experience adheres to what reality proposes, certain that doing so is another step toward his happiness. This insight has allowed us to rediscover the gift of marriage as a place that helps us by showing us all the faces that help us to breathe. The community sprang up around Fr. Yago, who untiringly shows us that by not ignoring our humanity, we can rediscover our desire and Him who embraces it. And so, some people from the parish began to participate in our School of Community. They are not used to our gestures or our language, so they constantly compel us to be true to what we are living and show us that we have nothing to defend. Even our small fraternity group (my wife, our friend, Cristina, and myself) is a place where we can protect everything that we are living and where we can repropose the insights and desires that we have discovered by living this friendship. For us, it is a gift that pushes us to recognize that all our efforts do not change our hearts one bit and to foster this recognition. For example, we decided that we would keep

open the doors of our home, which is a place to experience the waiting that enables me to rediscover that everything exists so that I may know Him better.

**Daniele**, El Masnou (Spain)

### A particular event of generation

A while ago, after a series of unexpected events, I went with a friend to a college about an hour from home to visit a couple of young women who had been in GS but who had distanced themselves from the life of the Movement. A young man who had started coming to our weekly School of Community and a friend of the two young women came with us. After we arrived, we sat down for a coffee and began to talk. After about an hour, I needed to head home, but they wanted me to stay. “Don’t go,” one of them said. So we all stayed together for a while longer. What made those hours so alive, so impossible (I’m twice their age) that, in talking about simple reality, something unique transpired, to the point that they didn’t want to leave? Through my eyes, the Lord happened in their lives also. But what was I doing? I simply allowed myself to be struck by what we were saying, and I judged with a humanity that I couldn’t even have dreamed of. What I discovered that day in a clear way is that in asking questions, in comparing everything with my heart, in provoking them to do the same, and in asking us to track down everything present in the experience of each person, I was not moving as an autonomous “I.” I was moving as a son. That is to say, I discovered that I was doing what, for years, I had seen and learned from a father, from Fr. Julián Carrón. I understand that I couldn’t act in any other way, just as we cannot ignore the traits our parents have passed on to us. This discovery made me so happy because it was Christ present who was acting through my freely given yes, but He didn’t act “generically,” but rather, through a particular event of generation. This is the living charism. It was not Fr. Carrón, but me, all me.



His name “disappeared,” as Fr. Giussani would say, but he appeared in my self-awareness. There is a name and surname, without which the charism would become in me just a museum piece.

**Sebastian**, Rochester (USA)

### In the IV room

After months of waiting and trepidation, my numbers finally allowed me to begin my first round of chemotherapy. I was happy to go: to begin meant leaving the tunnel of this illness. The IV room is a large room with ten to fifteen stations, each with its IV and its pain. The first two hours went well, but when the chemo drugs entered my body, a violent allergic reaction forced the doctors to intervene and to stop the therapy. Everyone in the room witnessed my reaction. While I lay there exhausted, a Muslim woman finished her therapy, got up, came over to me and gave me a caress and a smile and then left. For me, it was clearly the caress of an angel, and I was overcome with emotion. On the way home, I was dazed. I still couldn't understand, and, in my heart, I battered the good Lord with questions: “Why won't you let me start? What do you want from me?” Once I got home, the principal of the public high school where I teach called, asking me if he could drop by my house. He arrived with a plant and cards for me written by the students of one of my classes. Then I surrendered: the good that was given to me was too great, it was too evident. Who was comforting me. I cried with emotion and gratitude. I hadn't received a “rational” answer to my questions, but Someone made Himself present with evidence of His love for me. I didn't understand, but my heart swelled and filled with gratitude.

**Lucia**

### Mommy's slippers

During the Christmas vacation, I spent time with my eighteen-month-old nephew. I was so struck by his attitude. When his mom wasn't home, he played happily with his dad, and in the middle of playing, he'd call out loudly, “Mommy!” without any hint of sadness or desperation arising from her temporary absence, but as an affirmation. Sometimes he would run toward the door, where his mom's slippers were, and pointing to them, would exclaim, “Mommy!” This behavior brought to mind what Fr. Julián Carrón often said to us university students: Jesus isn't one of many problems—

He is the answer, like a mother is for her child.

Intuitively, I correlated these two things, but it really didn't make sense to me. Why did my nephew look for his mom? He wasn't sad in those moments; in fact, he was enjoying his playtime. The answer came a few days later in the form of an insight: if I am living a beautiful moment, what could make this joy even greater? Those who are in love know this well; it is a desire that the presence that fills my heart be there with me to share that joy. So now I better understand what Fr. Carrón was telling us: Jesus is the presence we turn to, allowing Him to embrace us in difficult moments. But He is also the presence we should affirm in our day-to-day lives, because with Him, we experience that everything is more beautiful. And like the mom's slippers left by the door, for my nephew a sign of her presence, for us, a sign of His presence can be the sacraments, the faces of our friends, the morning sun.

**Giovanni**, Milan (Italy)

### The world outside that waits for me

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, before classes started again, I was in quarantine after being exposed to COVID. I lived this experience fairly well, looking forward to the world outside that was waiting for me. Five days later, when I could finally go out, I had such hopes of going back to living my life in a normal way, that normality which up until vacation had made me feel good. Upon returning to school, however, I found the situation to be anything but normal: ten of my classmates were absent, connected remotely from home, and it was clear that many people were absent throughout the school. What frightened me most was that, in that same period, many of my closest friends were in quarantine; I was afraid of finding myself alone, of not being able to see those faces that have always accompanied me. With this great fear, I found myself during Mass asking that I might be surprised by things and above all that I might notice small events that happen to me. I entrusted myself to this prayer, and sure enough, things did happen. On Wednesday, I was already on the bus to go home when suddenly I decided to get off the bus and to stop and have lunch with some people. My desire to live was evident, like a flame that flickers but does not go out, but I needed to rekindle it with the help of those people who perhaps weren't my closest friends, but whose faces make me aware that there is always something ready to surprise me.

**Ottavia**, Milan (Italy)

# Close-up

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Desio, 1945. Luigi Giussani (1922–2005) with the bicycle he received as a gift on the occasion of his first Mass.

# Encounter with the human

*The centrality of the event, the return to the “question,” the revolution of the heart. A dialogue with Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, on Fr. Luigi Giussani’s contribution to our time*



**Davide Perillo**

Christophe Pierre.



“I never met Fr. Giussani personally but I can say I was introduced to him through his disciples and then his books. It was a great help for me to understand my own experience of faith.” His experience of faith is rich and multifaceted like few others—seventy-six-year-old Monsignor Christophe Pierre, a Frenchman from Brittany (born in Rennes), the apostolic nuncio to the United States, has reached fifty-one years of priesthood and can look back over a career that brought him to half the world: New Zealand and Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Cuba, Brazil and Geneva, then Haiti, Uganda, and Mexico, before arriving at his office in Washington, where for six years he has held one of the most delicate positions on the map of Vatican diplomacy, and where he responds to our Zoom call smiling and holding up *To Give One’s Life for the Work of Another*, the most recently published book by the founder of CL. “I’m reading it now, and it seems to be a good summary of the fundamental themes of his thought. I believe it helps us to return to the freshness and originality of his charism. It’s not something old—it’s very topical. You should be aware of how precious it is.”

Pierre is a friend of and a father for the Movement. Shortly, if there is no lockdown, he will return to the New York Encounter, where he has been a regular guest and where he will celebrate the Mass for the anniversary of Fr. Giussani’s death. He also spoke of him at the 2018 Meeting of Rimini in a beautiful talk on the “true revolution” that people await expectantly (“encountering Christ and being changed by Him, the revolution of the heart, this is what turns the wheels of history!”). And today, in talking about his ties with Giussani, he starts with that word, “encounter.” “It’s fundamental. Christianity is an encounter, not with an idea or ideology, but with an event. This concept helped me understand my journey of faith as well.”



The consecration during Mass.

### How so?

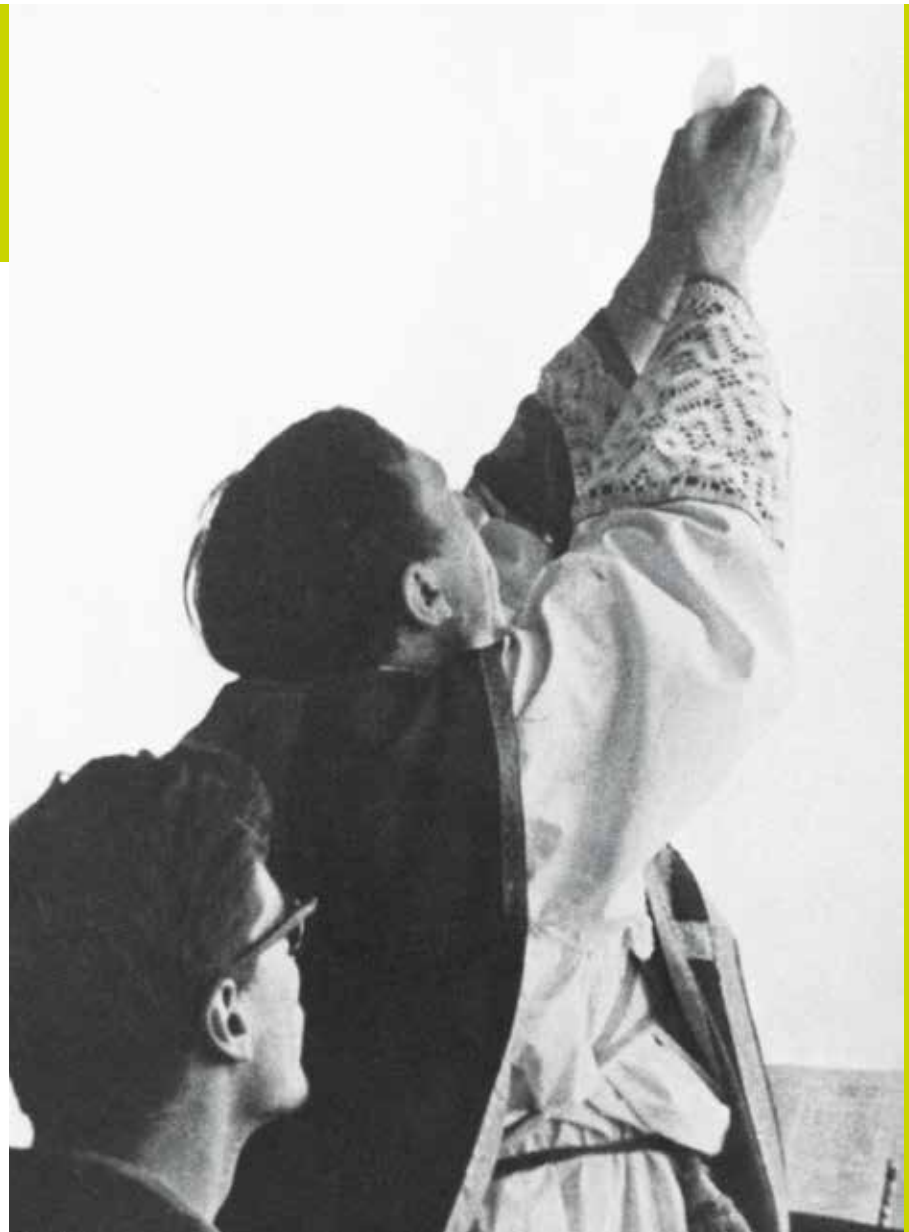
I have realized more clearly that my journey has been a series of events or encounters with an event, just as Giussani says. A series of encounters with Christ, but with a Christ who is not an idea—He manifested Himself through the experience of an encounter with a church that has always been present concretely in my life. I found on my road a series of witnesses who made me encounter His person.

### Who?

The first experience was in my family. My parents had already oriented their life on the basis of their encounter with Christ, and they transmitted Him to me, not just as a series of practices but as a person, a presence who affected their life, in their way of being with us, of behaving, and of looking at the world. For them, the presence of Christ was real. Giussani's reflections helped me understand that for me the encounter happened this way, in reality. There was no need to look for Him elsewhere. The rest of my life has been a continuation of the same phenomenon. For me, there wasn't a great intellectualization of faith. I've always seen Him as a real presence, and the more I read Giussani, the more I understand that He is the core.

### When did you first come upon the figure of Giussani?

When I arrived in Geneva in 1991. I was secretary to Archbishop Paul Fouad Tabet, the Permanent Ob-



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server at the United Nations. As soon as he was nominated, he left to see Giussani without telling me. It was a weekend of vacation. Returning, he told me, "I went to Giussani, and he will send someone to help us." And in a short time five or six CL people arrived, all very qualified in their professions—a university rector, a physician, an economist—more or less all of them members of *Memores Domini*. There I discovered this dimension of consecrated peo-

ple in whom human competence went together with a deep understanding of their Christian commitment and engagement. The coherence between these two aspects fascinated me. It corresponded to what I had always sought ever since I became a priest. In the seminary there was always talk about "faith and life," about how life could correspond to faith. Encountering these people, I passed from the slogan to the reality.



**With other encounters...**

It's a key word, beginning with the first encounter Giussani talked about, that of John and Andrew with Christ, a moment that determined the rest of their lives and of history. Every time I read about this encounter, it illuminates me. It is in full coherence with what Pope Francis says: all his homilies basically relate to the category of the "encounter," not just as "culture of meeting each other," as a social dimension, but precisely as encounter with Christ, which is very concrete.

**In an interview you said that the word "encounter" "is found hundreds of times in the pages of Giussani, but each time when he speaks about it, there is a sense of wonder, because he is talking about himself, his own experience." What did you mean?**

The word "wonder" is very important for the anthropology and philosophy of Giussani. He insists a great deal on the fact that reality "comes first." The dynamic of our knowledge, including our religious knowledge, is to receive and understand a reality that offers itself as something beautiful. In my theological study, I read Balthasar a lot. For him, the first step of faith is fascination—Christ offers Himself as a very humble reality, but one that impacts you and transforms your life. Giussani stresses the same thing: faith is born of the wonder of an encounter with a reality that offers itself to you, allowing you, with your capacity to understand—your reason—to discover it a little at a time. Fascination, which is almost a process of seduction, leads you to a deeper understanding.

**It's a use of reason quite different from that of modernity's.**

It's true, it's a different journey. We often claim to build reality starting from our vision, from our ideas. Illuminist modernity manipulated reason, enclosing it within itself instead of respecting its nature, which, as Giussani says, is "openness to the totality of reality." These terms say a lot. Reason opens you to the infinite, but starting from a vision of reality. This is very consistent with the knowledge of God through Jesus, who was born poor and humble, but in His spirit has the totality of

God and directs you to the Father. Well, this emphasis is tremendously effective medicine against the great temptation of our times, which I find everywhere, even in the church: ideology. In other words, reducing faith to a series of ideas that you would like to impose as your own vision, transforming it into a collection of principles, into morality. This is also a fundamental element of Giussani's vision and truly responds to a real problem of our times—morality is not just "the application of principles." It is born of an encounter that teaches you a new way of living with and relating to God and your sisters and brothers. This idea is very strong in Giussani, and it is crucial for dialoging with the contemporary mentality.

**And perhaps it captures better the bewilderment of people today, which is postmodern—they no longer have sustaining ideologies, but are wounded and needy...**

Women and men today are postmodern, but they remain modern in one aspect: they do not come out of themselves. They are not impacted by a *real* reality like the person of Christ. They have lost what modernity had given them, an ideology, but have not found the object of their search. Today's world suffers greatly from a certain fragmentation. It no longer knows where to go. The needs of the heart are not satisfied. For this reason, when I arrived in Mexico in 2007, I was struck by the reflection of the Latin American bishops at the Aparecida Conference. They had made a very interesting diagnosis: today the drama of our society, which also touches the mission of the church, is that faith is no longer transmitted from one generation to the next. But this is not just a generational problem: it goes much deeper. Those bishops attempted a proposal: recreating a place where people can return to having an experience of Christ, so that it can be transmitted to everyone.

**What contribution does Giussani's work make in this sense?**

We live in a fragmented world, permeated by social communication in which answers are given even before the questions are asked. Giussani returns to the question. Here we can introduce another fundamental

concept for Giussani: education. The word “educate” comes from *educere*: to extract, to draw forth a question. You can’t give an answer if there’s no question. Otherwise, the answer becomes ideology, an inheritance of ideas that have no roots. Also in this sense Giussani was a great educator.

### **Why?**

He learned starting from his experience, something that fascinated me greatly. From the beginning he re-oriented his own life because he perceived that it was necessary to help young people, starting from those first ones he met on the train. “First you have to return to the heart, to desire, and not give an answer immediately. If you give an answer immediately, it becomes ideological.” This is what happened in ’68, when he reoriented the Movement, even brutally, but because he felt it as needed urgently for himself, to help his disciples not fall into ideology and activism, but to return to listening to their own hearts. Only in this way can you educate to faith.

### **You have often said that Giussani helped you understand the church better. In what way?**

The church is not a club, an association of people who want to reach some goal. It is the companionship of those who have encountered Christ and share their friendship with Him. The church that I have known has never been just institutional: it has always been a church

of witnesses. In the Trilogy, Giussani speaks about it through a journey, from the religious sense to Christ and on to the church. I think this is crucial. As the bishops said at Aparecida, it is necessary to return to a church that can help people encounter Christ. If it is not such a place, then it is no longer the church. And the encounter with Christ happens only starting with witnesses, not with teaching. Or better, what is needed is teaching done by witnesses.

### **You said earlier that you were struck by the resonances between Giussani and Pope Francis. What points of contact do you see?**

Reading Giussani or the books of Julián Carrón, I’ve always said to myself that this method is structurally identical to the pope’s. I find the same elements: the encounter, the danger of ideology, the missionary dimension, openness to the other, the relationship between Christ and the church, the journey together, and today too, synodality as method. You find all these concepts in Giussani. They help you understand in today’s context where one must go to grow in faith.

### **You have seen the Movement grow in very different situations, but is there a common feature among the “children of Giussani” you have encountered?**

It’s true, I’ve met CL people in almost all the countries where I’ve worked. Friendships were formed

in Geneva. I sent some of them to Haiti, when we began the Catholic University. But also in other places. And I’ve always found this capacity to create new things with great professionalism, but also with a deep vision of faith, a harmony that you don’t always encounter in the church—in many spheres you find a dichotomy between faith and life. Here, no.

### **What is the most important contribution the charism of CL can give to the church today?**

To my mind, it is education in the Giussanian sense of the word, helping people to “have an encounter with reality.” Education to a relationship with reality was Giussani’s concern throughout his entire journey. When he intervened to straighten out the Movement, he always did so in this direction. This is an even more crucial challenge today. Just think, for example, about the whole battle with the traditionalists in the church. It’s a kind of illness of our time. Many Christians live practically off nostalgia alone. This means that they haven’t found something that deeply satisfies their hearts in the encounter with reality, with Christ, and so they turn to certain traditional forms. But nostalgia isn’t memory—memory is always a living person. This is another recurrent theme in Giussani.

**Last year in Bethesda, at the Mass for the anniversary of Giussani’s death, you closed your homily with**



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San Leo, Rimini, 1976.  
The Way of the Cross of university students.

**these words: “Giussani has left us a legacy of faith, and now it is a time for us to continue to make his charism known for the life of the whole church and for this country. As heirs of Fr. Giussani, may we accept our responsibility for the charism and for the gift of faith we have received.” What does it mean for those who live the Movement to accept this “responsibility for the charism”?**

Giussani’s charism is profoundly ecclesial, Catholic. Like all the charisms, it is a gift of God for the church. Obviously, this applies to people, helping the individual to enter into a certain dynamic of personal growth and humanization starting from an encounter with Christ. Giussani was a pastor-theologian. He compared experiences and dialogued with the culture experienced above all by the young people he encountered. He touched its most delicate and fundamental points—the reduction of Christianity to ideology and modernity and postmodernity. But he was able to see these phenomena because he could go to the root of the problem: faith. So, to my mind it is important, especially in the current moment in the life of the Movement, to continue rediscovering this method and offering it to the church. The circumstance you are going through is an invitation to put your charism even more at the service of the church. ■

# Looking at things with an awareness of what Christ is doing



Maurizio Vitali

*Adriano Rusconi, one of the young people who would later become the first Memores Domini, has followed Giussani his entire life. We met with him so that he could tell us what that beginning has generated in him.*

10

**I**n a courtyard in a rural town in the valley south of Milan called Gudo Gambaredo, surrounded by acres of rich farmland, green fields, and pasture for cows is the first “house” of the Adult Group (later *Memores Domini*). It was established in 1968 by young graduates who wanted to live their vocation to virginity, which had developed during their time in the Gioventu Studentesca with Father Luigi Giussani, together in community. Paolo Mangini, Angelo Di Chiano, Vincenzo Moretti, and Adriano Rusconi, the four original members, used to come here while in GS to do charitable work on Sundays. Adriano, now eighty-two years old, met Father Giussani in 1956 at Berchet High School, and remained in touch with him later as both a friend and as his doctor.

**Adriano, who is Father Giussani to you?**

He is the one who made me discover who Christ is.

**You did not know Christ before? You were not Christian?**

I understood religion to consist of not committing sins.

**Instead, what did you learn?**

For Father Giussani, Christ is a presence that is connected to everything, and he counseled us to live everything with an awareness that this presence is the great novelty of life.

**How did you begin to perceive this novelty?**

In 1956, the USSR violently suppressed an uprising in Hungary. The principal of Berchet High School, who was Jewish, asked Father Giussani to say a Mass for the victims. In his homily, he said, “If we had lived our Christian faith to the fullest, these tragic events would not have happened.”

**To call these words shocking is an understatement.**

These were the words of someone who believed and lived what he said. And for this reason, his words were credible. When his father passed away, the things Father Giussani said in his homily were the same things that he taught during gatherings or in class. So at those words, I was startled: “Wow, a professor who says things that are true!”





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**When people hear the word virginity, they interpret this choice as a loss. What does being called to virginity mean to you?**

Virginity, as we were taught, is to look at things with an awareness of what Christ is doing in them. And poverty means treating everything as being given to you by Another. Since Christ is a presence, I find this very, very reasonable. This way of looking at things is something all baptized people are called to do. Giussani used to say that God gave the vocation of virginity to some so that everyone can understand that it is possible to live this way.

Cimon de la Pala, 1961.  
Fr. Giussani with his students  
at the GS vacation.  
Adriano Rusconi is the first one  
from the left, standing.

**Have you ever seen virginity in this sense of the word being lived by people who are married?**

Absolutely yes. One example is Giuseppe. My friend and fellow doctor Carlo Grillo and I met him at School of Community. He had a lymphogranuloma and the next day he was supposed to be treated at the hospital. "We will look after you." A few days later, Giuseppe said, "Father Manuel, Father Giussani...They did not answer my calls. If you see them, tell them that while here in the hospital, I have understood that the things we talk about are true. They are true to the core and there is no need to look elsewhere." When he knew he did not have much time left, he asked to be taken to Lourdes. In the cave where the apparition took place, Giuseppe prayed for five things: for GS, that it might grow; for Fr. Giussani, that he might guide the students; for himself: "Whether I live or die, that I may be useful for what I have met;" for his children and his wife; and for the other patients in his hospital room. It was then that I understood that virginity was not my prerogative; it was only an aspect of a certain way of life. Virginity is something lived by anyone who recognizes Another as the meaning of everything.

**As for the rest, Giussani did not invent the *Memores Domini*, as he himself said. Some of the graduates of the class of 1964, at the end of the process of "verifying" their vocation, wanted to live a life of virginity but also as laypeople, and to "follow" the Movement...**

This was the origin of what he called the Adult Group. Giussani spoke about life as vocation, and virginity as paying attention to what was being born in us. He guided us and educated us to live our faith as a method of recognizing "Someone present."

In the same way, establishing the house in Gudo was not his idea. It came from us four "Memores." He answered, "All right! But set aside a room for me so that I can come to see what you are living." There we first discovered our rooms as "cells" like in a monastery, the place where our "I" encountered God, as well as silence, in order to have a space for the memory of God to grow stronger, and other people as signs of the presence and companions on the journey toward destiny.

**As stated in Giussani's biography, already in 1966 Giussani was convinced that "our vocation is authentic when we express it in what we do...We must be witnesses of Christ in everyday life, in our routine, in our workplace."**

I can confirm that having a true position before things has a tremendous impact on work. It radically changes your perspective and gives birth to a new way of acting that is not violent, but rather a more complete, comprehensive way; for example, of treating patients. If a primary care physician asked me, "Why focus so much on this? Why take such special care of patients?" I never cared. I don't need anyone's permission. God put you there and that's where you stay, looking to recognize His presence in your work.

**Therefore, you strive toward being fully present.**

Exactly. As a doctor in a benefit society, everyone knew me and still knows me here in Gudo. People recognized me when I would drive by with Fr. Giussani. When people saw me, they greeted me. He would say to me, "Don't just talk to me. Greet them instead." Let me give you another example. One of my friends said he no longer wanted to go to work since the company did not give fair treatment

or pay to its employees. Giussani replied, "Okay, so you want to leave... but what about the other workers? Do you adhere to the circumstances that God has placed in front of you or do you trust in your decision to escape?" Fully immersing yourself in the task that God gave you is exemplified by the Benedictines. In fact, the Cascinazza Monastery is a very short distance from here.

**The monastic way of life is prevalent in the Po Valley. About nine miles west of Gudo there is the Moribondo Abbey, while the Chiaravalle Abbey is to the east. Monks have restored, evangelized, and humanized this area.**

In front of lands and people devastated by conflict, the monks instilled *ora et labora*. They demonstrated what it means to live and work with the awareness of a presence. While the barbarians came through and destroyed everything, the monks would build, with the certainty that "God has placed us here. And we stand by this judgment." In the time in which we are living, which is different but no less dramatic, being a *Memor Domini* means embracing that judgment and that relationship in every circumstance.

**It comes naturally to pause to say something about Rusconi. Believe me when I say that Rusconi has lived and lives a full and productive life. Strangely, though... he does not describe it (as many of us would) as "I did this. I did that." Instead, he puts it as "what I saw happen" and "how I recognized Christ's presence." For example...**

There was a woman who was terminally ill. She was married and had three children. She asked me to help her bring back a woman from Colombia who was her friend and colleague in the Fraternity of Saint



Adriano Rusconi, born in 1940.



Joseph so that she could show her children that even if she were to die they would not lose her. The friend came and lived with them and remained with them for a few months after the woman passed away. Afterwards, I saw a great sense of peace and certainty in those children. I would never have thought of doing something like that.

**After Giussani passed away, how did you go forward?**

I had the certainty that the Movement would continue because it came into the world *through* Giussani, but *from* Another.

**Carrón, following in the footsteps of Giussani, emphasized that the continuation of the charism is the responsibility of every member.**

And I must say that this is the reason that Carrón's leadership has been so valuable. I greatly appreciate how he led the School of Community during the pandemic. He never said, "This is how you do this." Rather, he said that we must stay in front of the presence because Christ is present. When I treat a patient or someone who is terminally ill, Christ is present, and I can recognize Him and be a witness to that presence.

**In the end, having an authority figure is fundamental.**

What is crucial is the definition of authority that Giussani taught us. An authority is someone who recognizes the truth whenever it manifests itself. Giussani once described himself as "a conduit" through which Another passes like water, and he added that we can sometimes look at just the conduit instead of recognizing the water and what it is continually generating. At a certain point, an individual who was much younger than I became the new leader of the house in Gudo. I asked Giussani, "And how are we older people supposed to respond?" He said, "In the face of the circumstances or events that present themselves, you must communicate the traditions of the Adult Group you bear within and wait for a judgment to emerge within your communion, which can happen through you just as easily as it can through the newest member." There is no position that gives you more freedom than this one.

**What is your experience of the current situation of the Memores under the guidance of Archbishop Filippo Santoro, the Special Delegate appointed by the pope?**

I met Santoro while I was in college and saw him again in Brazil in 1989 when I went with Father Giussani to the meeting with the leaders of CL in Latin America. He has always immersed himself in the life of the Movement and is familiar with the Memores. The pope's choice shows a positive kind of attention for us, and I am certain that it is a way of accompanying us so the charism might flourish.

**Our conversation ends here. Rusconi heads out to go see a close friend.**

Mariuccia, the daughter of the doctor who replaced Pampuri, is a Memores and will turn 104 in July. She fell not too long ago and fractured her femur... Nevertheless, at the hospital, the doctors, nurses, and relatives of the other patients were amazed by her joy and positivity, which comes from her living every moment in His presence. The last time I saw her I asked her, "Are you happy?"

Yes.

"And why are you happy?"

*Because God gives me life.*

"When you meet God, I am certain that He will be pleased, because you have always loved Him."

*Noooo! It is He who loves me.*

You see, I go visit her in order to learn from her. ■

## Cambodia

# With Giussani on the Mekong

A missionary in Cambodia for over twenty years, Fr. Alberto Caccaro describes the revolution that began within him as he traveled from village to village and recounts why he decided to translate *The Risk of Education* into Khmer.



Anna Leonardi

**R**ice fields as far as the eye can see, dirt roads, villages of houses on stilts, and farmers waiting for the great Mekong River to flood their fields. Fr. Alberto Caccaro passed all these things on his motorcycle day after day at the beginning of his adventure in Cambodia. Every morning he set out for unknown destinations from Prey Veng, the small provincial capital where the bishop sent him in 2004, a place where no Catholic priest had lived before. His travels were guided by an old military map from the Vietnam War years, on which he marked everything, the towns, paths, and people. Almost all of them were Buddhist and did not know what a priest was, but they always welcomed him as a blessing. “They brought me into their homes, to their sick, and I helped them as well as I could with medicine and at times by getting them hospitalized,” recounts the PIME missionary. Their simple questions always led him back to the heart of his vocation. “They asked me, ‘Are you married? Do you have children?’ and I answered, ‘I have no wife, for God. I have no children, for God.’”

**During those daily explorations,** Fr. Alberto came to see how difficult it was for children in the villages to continue their studies. The few middle and high schools were

concentrated in the big urban centers. The more ambitious students had to travel hours or move to the city. “The dream of building a school began in this way, to meet a need I saw. A very high percentage of students abandoned school, and it was normal for many young people to seek their fortune in nearby Thailand. In addition, we opened a hostel in Prey Veng to host out-of-town students, and there I became aware of the many problems of the government schools.” The students returned to the hostel discontented, and even the most gifted ones were unmotivated, notwithstanding the money and effort it cost them to attend. He understood this more from their many absences than from their poor scores. “The only proposal I saw from the school was paid private lessons at the homes of the teachers, a system that gave rise to many ambiguities,” he recounts. He felt the urgent need for a different place, but his superiors held him back. “The apostolic prefect at the time was of Indian origin and feared that the educational projects of Westerners would become schools for the elite; he always expressed many doubts.” But Fr. Alberto did not become discouraged. While everything seemed to be blocked, his dream received new impetus during a visit to the PIME house in Phnom Penh, the capital. “I



found a copy of the magazine *Traces* and I read with surprise a few articles about the educational works of the Movement, which I did not know very well. It was electrifying. I didn't waste a minute. I called a fellow PIME priest in Italy and asked him to send me *The Risk of Education* by Fr. Giussani. There I found the flesh and substance of my dream."

That was in 2005. Since then, he has read it at least six more times, penning the year of each subsequent reading on the title page: 2006, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2017. These were the times he felt the need to "look again at the dream," and nourish it. "In the beginning, Giussani's words burned away the solitude I felt and encouraged me to set out on the road I felt called to travel. The idea that education introduces students to the totality of reality helped me give form to the school I imagined, and suggested the criteria for thinking about the curriculum and the selection of personnel. In sum, in Giussani I found my travel companion." Nor was he the only one. That same year, Fr. Alberto managed to acquire a piece of property just outside Prey Veng, using the savings he had set aside since his ordination in 1995 and help from

The children of the  
Pka Doung Middle School.





Above, Fr. Alberto Caccaro with Sagn in 2008. Caccaro, born in 1968, is today the vicar general of the Kompong Cham Apostolic Prefecture. Below, the Khmer language edition of *The Risk of Education*, translated by Fr. Caccaro.



some friends. Unfortunately, numerous bureaucratic and financial obstacles slowed the beginning of construction, until one day a Korean entrepreneur showed up at his door. “A young member of the parish, a clerk in a company in Phnom Penh, brought him to me. He had heard that his boss, a Buddhist, wanted to finance an educational project in a rural context, and he had told him about me.” The priest’s ideas quickly energized the entrepreneur, and that meeting sufficed for him to decide to commit to the effort for the next ten years with \$200,000.

**Having found someone** who would make the foundations of the school strong, Fr. Alberto started looking for someone who could share the idea of a school centered on the education of the human in all its dimensions. Through the students at

the hostel, he met a young teacher and entrusted the direction of the school to him. “Reading Giussani, it became increasingly clear to us that we had to give dignity to every subject and every teacher. And even if we could not appeal directly to one concept of truth, given that the vast majority of the students were Buddhist, we understood that the concern to teach ‘the true’ had to happen within the adverbial form; that is, by doing everything ‘truly.’ We had to run a school ‘truly’: a timetable truly, a lesson truly, an exam truly, give a D truly and an A truly, and do janitorial work truly. Only in this way would we be able to lead our students to the ultimate substance of things.”

Since the inauguration of the school in 2008, three other schools have been established in different locations in the province, with the



motto “Small is Beautiful” because they always opted to build small schools, no more than 150 students, promoting a capillary presence in the province. “That first experience multiplied itself through the many graduates who, because of the experience they had had, wanted to continue to be involved as teachers,” explains Fr. Alberto. This was the case of Sagn, who excelled in physics and would have wanted to continue studying it at the university, but decided to take the admission exam for the government school for teachers. He passed, and while he was working on his education degree, he also began helping out at the school. “During his lunch break he ran to the school and collected the students’ notebooks so he could correct their exercises, and also was available to answer their questions.” He soon became the tutor for scientific subjects, and was then promoted to a more permanent position. Another former student, Chuan, teaches computer sciences at the school now. Like many teachers, he was able to read Giussani’s *The Risk of Education* because of Fr. Alberto’s 2010 translation of it into Khmer. “The desire to publish the book in Cambodian was an act of gratitude on my part, as well as an instrument for the formation of the teachers and a gold mine of starting points for entering into dialogue with the families.” Speaking with the parents, he often repeats Fr. Giussani’s words, very understandable even in this place: “Giving a child life would count for nothing if parents failed to tirelessly help their children recognize the total meaning of that life.”

**The work of translation was long** and at times difficult. Fr. Alberto asked the help of Hong, a student in the Prey Veng hostel whom he had met at the beginning of his mission during one of his exploratory trips in the villages around the city. That day the road was in terrible condition, reduced to mud-filled rutted tracks, and little Hong had stopped his bicycle to let Fr. Alberto pass. The child’s gaze softened Fr. Alberto’s. He turned off the motorcycle and asked the boy where he was going in all that rain. “To school,” he replied, without betraying the weight of those twenty miles a day. Fr. Alberto arranged right away to get him a place in the hostel, little imagining that thirty years later they would be working side by side, looking for the best words for translating Fr. Giussani.

“Cambodian is a very pragmatic language, and some concepts, for example ‘Mystery,’ have no equivalent.

Hong and I tried to get as close as possible, digging into the words and our experience. So ‘Mystery,’ for example, became something that is there but that you cannot see, like a set of keys you cannot find,” explains Fr. Alberto. But at times the explanations do not suffice. The line, “He is the substance of our life,” stumped them for a long time. At a certain point, Fr. Alberto, tired of all their attempts, grasped in his fingers the tablecloth covering the table they were working on and said, “Hong, touching this tablecloth I can sense the weave, whether it is cotton or nylon. In the same way, if I touch your hand, I sense what you are made of. You are made of God.” At that point Hong understood.

Today Fr. Alberto’s schools enjoy a certain fame. Years ago, the photographs of some students who had graduated with high honors and received awards from Prime Minister Hun Sen circulated all over internet. Many rebaptized the school as “Jesus’s school.” Fr. Alberto smiles at the idea, and thinks back to how difficult it was at the beginning of the adventure to find students willing to enroll because they feared that doing so would be the prelude to being proselytized. “Instead, I wagered on the ‘fragrance’ of a place, made up of the ‘I’ of the student and the ‘us’ of the school, neither of which could be reduced to the other, but which promote each other in turn and within which education happens.” He had neither formulas nor procedures to hand on to those who took over the management of the various schools. “All we can do is offer places, be they just a sheet of paper or a drop of ink, where it is possible to cultivate the desire for something deeper. Through the various disciplines, we can enable students to sense that there is a ‘secret’ behind all that is visible. This is what school is: a place with doors and windows thrown wide open.”

**He understands this clearly** when he visits the younger classes. The children who run up to him as if he were their father make him feel the gravity of his responsibility. “They are like many questions, expecting an answer. They are implicitly asking me for the meaning of life, love, friendship, time, and pain, and I don’t want to wound them. I feel I would be lying if I gave them tidy little speeches about values, so I encourage the teachers to answer these questions slowly, over time, with their presence, their well-prepared lessons, and their orderly classrooms.” But then he says, “Only God can answer those questions. Only God is worthy of their freedom. Nobody else. These children deserve God, nothing less.” ■

Close-up

# In love with Christ: in an encounter, the road

*Because of the deep relationship that tied them together, we asked Benedict XVI to provide a recollection of Fr. Giussani. The pope emeritus suggested that we republish the homily he preached at Fr. Giussani's funeral as the best memory and the most reliable testimony he could offer for his friend.*



Joseph Ratzinger

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**D**ear Brothers in the episcopate and in the priesthood, “the disciples rejoiced to see Jesus.” These words of the Gospel just read indicate the center of the personality and of the life of our dear Fr. Giussani.

Fr. Giussani grew up in a home—as he himself said—poor as far as bread was concerned but rich with music, and thus from the start he was touched, or better, wounded, by the desire for beauty. He was not satisfied with any beauty whatever, a banal beauty; he was looking rather for Beauty itself, infinite Beauty, and thus he found Christ, in Christ true beauty, the path of life, the true joy. Already as a boy, along with other young men, he created a community called *Studium Christi*. Their program was to speak of nothing else but Christ, because everything else seemed to be a waste of time. Naturally, he was able to overcome the unilaterality, but he always kept the substance. Only Christ gives meaning to the

whole of our life. Fr Giussani always kept the eyes of his life and of his heart fixed on Christ. In this way, he understood that Christianity is not an intellectual system, a packet of dogmas, a moralism; Christianity is rather an encounter, a love story; it is an event.

**This love affair with Christ**, this love story which is the whole of his life, was however far from every superficial enthusiasm, from every vague romanticism. Really seeing Christ, he knew that to encounter Christ means to follow Christ. This encounter is a road, a journey, a journey that passes also—as we heard in the psalm—through the “valley of darkness.” In the Gospel, we heard of the last darkness of Christ’s suffering, of the apparent absence of God, when the world’s Sun was eclipsed. He knew that to follow is to pass through a “valley of darkness,” to take the way of the cross, and to live all the same in true joy.





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Why is it so? The Lord himself translated this mystery of the cross, which is really the mystery of love, with a formula in which the whole reality of our life is explained. The Lord says, “Whoever seeks his life, will lose it, and whoever loses his life, will find it.”

Fr. Giussani really wanted not to have his life for himself, but he gave life, and exactly in this way found life not only for himself but for many others. He practiced what we heard in the Gospel: he did not want to be served but to serve, he was a faithful servant of the Gospel, he gave out all the wealth of his heart, he gave out all the divine wealth of the Gospel with which he was penetrated and, serving in this way, giving his life, this life of his gave rich fruit—as we see in this moment—he has become really father of many and, having led people not to himself but to Christ, he really won hearts; he has helped to make the world better and to open the world’s doors for heaven.

**This centrality of Christ in his life** gave him also the gift of discernment, of deciphering correctly the signs of the times in a difficult time, full of temptations and of errors, as we know. Think of 1968 and the following years. A first group of his followers went to Brazil and found itself

Milan Cathedral. February 24, 2005.  
Then-cardinal Ratzinger  
during the homily.



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The crowd in the Duomo Square  
 in Milan. The Funeral was attended  
 by 30,000 people.

face to face with extreme poverty,  
 with extreme misery. What can be  
 done? How can we respond? There  
 was a great temptation to say, "For  
 the moment we have to set Christ  
 aside, set God aside, because there  
 are more pressing needs. First we  
 have to change the structure, the  
 external things; first we must im-  
 prove the earth, then we can find  
 heaven again." It was the great  
 temptation of that moment to  
 transform Christianity into a mor-  
 alism and moralism into politics,  
 to substitute believing with doing.  
 Because what does faith imply? We  
 can say, "In this moment we have  
 to do something." And all the same,

in this way, by substituting faith  
 with moralism, believing with do-  
 ing, we fall into particularisms,  
 we lose most of all the criteria and  
 the orientations, and in the end we  
 don't build, we divide.  
 Monsignor Giussani, with his  
 fearless and unfailing faith, knew  
 that, even in this situation, Christ,  
 the encounter with Him, remains  
 central, because whoever does not  
 give God, gives too little, and who-  
 ever does not give God, whoever  
 does not make people find God in  
 the face of Christ, does not build,  
 but destroys, because he gets hu-  
 man activity lost in ideological and  
 false dogmatisms.



Fr. Giussani kept the centrality of Christ and, exactly in this way, with social works, with necessary service, he helped mankind in this difficult world, where the responsibility of Christians for the poor in the world is enormous and urgent.

Whoever believes has also to pass through the “valley of darkness,” the dark valleys of discernment, as well as adversities, opposition and ideological hostilities that even took the form of threats to eliminate his people physically, so as to get rid of this other voice that is not content merely with doing things, but brings a greater message, and thus also a greater light.

In virtue of the faith, Monsignor Giussani passed fearlessly through these dark valleys and, naturally, with the novelty he carried with him, found it difficult to find a niche inside the Church. Even though the Holy Spirit, according to the needs of the times, creates something new, which is really the return to the origins, it is difficult to see one’s way and to find peaceful harmony in the great communion of the Universal Church. Fr. Giussani’s love for Christ was also love for the Church, and thus he always remained a faithful servant, faithful to the Holy Father and faithful to his bishops.

With his foundations he also gave new interpretation to the mystery of the Church.

**Communion and Liberation** brings to mind immediately this discovery proper of the modern era: freedom. It also brings to mind St. Ambrose’s phrase, “Ubi fides ibi libertas.” Cardinal Biffi drew our attention to the near coincidence of this phrase of St. Ambrose with the foundation of Communion and Liberation. Focusing on freedom as a gift proper of faith, he also told us that freedom, in order to be true, human freedom, freedom in truth, needs communion. An isolated freedom, a freedom only for the “I,” would be a lie, and would destroy human communion. In order to be true, and therefore in order to be efficient, freedom needs communion, and not just any kind of communion, but ultimately communion with truth itself, with love itself, with Christ, with the Trinitarian God. Thus is built community that creates freedom and gives joy.

The other foundation, the *Memoires Domini*, brings to mind again the second Gospel read today: the memory that the Lord gave us in the Holy Eucharist, memory that is not merely a remembrance of the past, but memory that creates a present, memory in which He gives Himself into our hands and into our hearts, and thus makes us live.

**Through valleys of darkness...** In the last period of his life, Fr. Giussani had to pass through the dark valley of sickness, of infirmity, of pain, of suffering, but here, too, his eyes were fixed on Jesus, and thus he remained true in all the suffering; seeing Jesus, he was able to rejoice. The joy of the Risen One was present, who even in the passion is the Risen One and gives us the true light and joy, and he knew that—as the psalm says—even passing through this valley, “I fear no evil because I know that You are with me, and I will dwell in the Father’s house.” This was his great strength, knowing that “You are with me.”

My dear faithful, dear young people above all, let us take this message to heart, let us not lose sight of Christ and let us not forget that without God nothing good can be built and that God remains enigmatic if He is not recognized in the face of Christ.

Now your dear friend Fr. Giussani has reached the other world, and we are convinced that the door of the Father’s house has opened. We are convinced that now this word is fully realized: they rejoiced to see Jesus. He is rejoicing with a joy that no one can take from him. In this moment, we wish to thank the Lord for the great gift of this priest, of this faithful servant of the Gospel, of this father. We entrust his soul to the goodness of his Lord and ours.

In this hour we wish to pray particularly, too, for the health of the Holy Father, taken once more into hospital. May the Lord accompany him and give him strength and health. And let us pray that the Lord enlighten us and give us the faith that builds the world, the faith that makes us find the path of life, true joy. Amen. ■



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# To Give One's Life for the Work of Another

LUIGI GIUSSANI

*Edited by Julián Carrón*

Some of Father Luigi Giussani's most poignant teachings, available in print for the first time.

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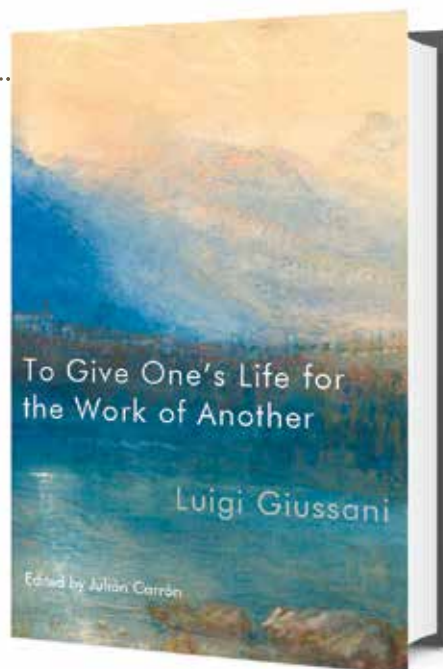
Father Luigi Giussani engaged tirelessly in educational initiatives throughout the course of his life. Much of his thought was communicated through the richness and rhythm of oral discourse, preserved as audio and video recordings in the archive of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation in Milan.

This volume presents the last three spiritual exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, drawing from the transcripts of these recordings. In these exercises Giussani investigates the rise of ethics and the decline of ontology that have accompanied modernity and the spread of rationalism. Bearing up against old age and illness, he resisted the urge to withdraw, instead finding new avenues of communication and the technological means to reach all corners of the movement. *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another* explores the nature of God, the powerful human experience of self-awareness, and the fundamental components of Christianity, in the unmistakable voice of a consummate teacher.

At a time when young people are abandoning the church and questioning the value of faith, Father Giussani's method of judging and verifying Christianity as an experience is a timeless intervention.

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Monsignor **Luigi Giussani** (1922–2005) was the founder of the Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation in Italy. His works are available in over twenty languages and include the trilogy *The Religious Sense*, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, and *Why the Church?*, as well as the three volumes of *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*



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## SPECIFICATIONS

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