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05

***The beautiful
day***

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Fr. Luigi Giussani (1922-2005).

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GIUSSANI

100

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OF BIRTH

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Now

“**T**he present moment, from then on, was no longer banal for me.” This was the newness introduced in a watershed moment in the life of Luigi Giussani in his first year of high school, when what he called “the beautiful day” happened. His story of that day appears in the first article of this issue, which comes out near the date of his birth, October 15, 100 years ago. The Christian announcement reached him at the age of 15 as the only answer worthy of his heartrending longing for the infinite. Even at such a young age, he perceived this mystery in himself so powerfully that he considered a man who lived 200 years before, Giacomo Leopardi, to be his friend. For one month, Giussani immersed himself in Leopardi’s poetry, eventually calling him “the most striking companion along my religious itinerary.” If Giussani had not felt in all its urgency the expectant awaiting that constituted his heart, he would not have recognized Christ as the most important presence for him and the world. The encounter between his humanity and Christ marked the beginning of the story that God worked in him through his thought and apostolate, making him a witness to the words of John Paul II: “There will not be faithfulness if it is not rooted in this ardent, patient and generous search; if there is not in man’s heart a question to which only God gives an answer, or rather, to which only God is the answer.” Giussani passionately loved the seriousness of the human question, exclaiming, “Even when this entreaty is intentionally alive, how much do we forget in the heap of minutes and hours that make up the day! How far we wander away from ourselves during the course of our life’s journey!” He went on: “And so as not to forget who we are, the answer must be present.”

For many, a great many, the “beautiful day” happened when they came upon the life of Giussani, which was so full of the reality of that “day.” Incarnating it in the way he lived in reality, Giussani showed everyone what Christianity is: an event. As Pope Francis said in his audience with the Movement in 2015, “You know how important the experience of encounter was to Fr. Giussani: the encounter not with an idea, but with a Person, with Jesus Christ.” In the magazine, we propose some passages documenting the intensity with which Giussani lived each instant, even the most ordinary moments—this “now” that we all live. You will also find testimonies of people who, touched by Giussani’s experience of faith, began to believe in Christ in a way that was persuasive for others, people who attract others “to discover—or to see more easily—how Christ is a presence.”

As Davide Prospero reminded us in his letter of invitation to the audience with the Holy Father on October 15, “We exist only for this.” We prepare for the audience by becoming more aware of the gift we have received in the life of Fr. Giussani, and “continuing to beg, first and foremost for ourselves, for Him who alone can fulfil the thirst of the human heart: Jesus of Nazareth.”

Letters

Giuseppe, Marco, Natasha, Giorgio

edited by
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Glued to my chair

I saw the entire virtual exhibit dedicated to the hundredth anniversary of Fr. Giussani's birth. Even though it took more than two hours, I was glued to my chair and at the end, I cried. They were not tears of nostalgia, but of gratitude for having encountered a man like him, who helped me rediscover the church, the faith, and my vocation. If I hadn't encountered him, I don't know what my life would have been like, but it certainly wouldn't be what it is now. I am grateful to Fr. Giussani for two things: above all for the rediscovery of the church, which isn't an institution or an organization, but rather Christ alive who touches me and speaks to me now. Also, along with St. John Paul II, he has kept me company, especially in the first years of my priesthood. It is as if both have taken me by the hand and guided me into the great mystery of Christ, who illuminates life and causes us to be daring and enthusiastic. In a word: Fr. Giussani gave me everything that a man could want for understanding the reason for and meaning of life. But that "everything" would be nothing without verifying, instant after instant, that Christ responds to my human need. It would be a beautiful ornament on a shelf, but it would never go so far as to decide my life and my destiny. I am ever more aware of how important the charism of Fr. Giussani is for the church and for the world. And a lifetime isn't long enough to say "thank you."

Fr. Giuseppe, Viterbo (Italy)

Shoveling mud alongside flood victims

In response to our friend's request, Sandra and I set out for the flooded area of Senigallia with a group of ten GS students. When we got there, we were able to see with our own eyes the dreadful destruction caused by the flood waters. What to do? We rolled up our sleeves and began to try to save whatever was salvageable by shoveling the mud, collecting scattered items, resetting potted plants, and making piles of the debris that the flood hadn't carried away. At the end of the day, we were tired and our arms were sore, but we were glad because we perceived that in the work we had done there was something that corresponded to what our heart desires. As Fr. Giussani always taught us: "The supreme law of our being is to share the being of others." This was confirmed in the words written by Graziano, who had led our work. "Dear friends, I thank you with all my heart. You brought very precious help, concrete help in all the work you did, human help for the hope you gave us. Thanks also to everyone who gave us valuable material. You gave immense comfort to everyone, including the other volunteers who were there to help, including me. Although I was not directly impacted, I found myself involved in this situation, which we can surely define as tragic, but from which we are all receiving so many graces, through which so much humanity, hope, and faith are springing forth. God bless you. No matter how little or much we can do, He multiplies and gives us back even more than we gave".

Marco, Pesaro (Italy)

"We have seen the starry sky"

So many words have been written about the death of Gorbachev that it's difficult to add anything. But for me, it's important to find words because it's

thanks to him that the icebreaker of Perestroika broke apart the immovable ice cap that had tied my country down. This icebreaker destroyed much of what it found in its path because it was made of the same material as the Soviet tanks and submarines and allowed the strong current to come to the surface. Words came out along with pain, rage, and fear: with words we breathed, we were warmed, we lived. The living human word sounded from everywhere, destroying the armor of bronzed expressions that were seen as eternal and inevitable. Monuments and values were toppled, even our very lives were turned upside down. Many perceived this as a catastrophe or a shipwreck. But for my generation, it was exactly that wind of change that brought with it a new hope, the chance to choose our own life path. And I wouldn't change this first experience of liberty for anything in the world. Today, too many among us have seen the starry sky and are not ready to exchange that for anything. Now that we risk finding ourselves behind the wall again, we transform ourselves into water so we can flow through it, becoming underground rivers. Once you find your voice, you can't go back to the reign of stupidity: your voice can resonate from the deepest well. Maybe there hasn't been enough time to learn how to build, but we have our voice, and I believe in its power more than in the art of the demolishers who blow up the walls. I can't imagine what awaits us, but I am sure of one thing: I will continue to do what I've been taught by my era—to use my human voice.

Natasha, Moscow (Russia)

That incredible preference

It was December, 2005, during my second year of university, and I was going through a difficult time. During this same period, my sister Lucia had started visiting a Benedictine monk from Cascinazza, Fr. Quique [died September 13th]. She said that her encounter with him gave her a restart: she felt understood and embraced. I desired that embrace, so one morning it occurred to me to call and set up a meeting with him. He said, "Now go and immerse yourself in the CLU Exercises and when you get back, come and see me." Halfway through December, I entered the small sitting room that in the next seventeen years would become the place for our dialogues, and I told him my troubles.

I understood that I could unload everything on him, even my pettiest thoughts. He did not remove his gaze from me, although from time to time I looked away, mostly out of awkwardness, as I wasn't able to hold back my tears. He said, "Your anxiety is Him, Jesus, who puts His foot in the door and wants to be with you!" I experienced a peace I had never felt before, a peace that doesn't eliminate the war with oneself. He added, "We ask that we become able to gaze upon ourselves with the same kindness that God has for us." Those words were not just for effect, but were a sharing of what he experienced himself, what he was working on, what he meditated on, and what he discussed with friends and superiors. This made him more human, accessible, and authoritative, and it facilitated our work. That encounter gave a new beginning to my life, to my knowing Jesus, to my vocation. In fact, soon thereafter, the adventure with Teresa began. In January, 2006, I returned with her to visit Fr. Quique, in a dynamic parallel to what moved Andrew to involve others in a relationship with Jesus. A deep friendship was born between her and Fr. Quique, an incredible preference inside a radical affirmation of what corresponds to life and what doesn't. We didn't let go of each other and for fifteen years we would return once a month to say confession and to share the steps we were taking and what Fr. Quique was doing. So many friends, struck by this dynamic, went to meet him and the encounter repeated itself. Who knows in the future how many things I will become aware of that make me savor the consistency that was able to mature through our encounter with him.

Giorgio, Milan (Italy)

Close-up



The beautiful day

Fr. Luigi Giussani recounts the moment when—during his first year in high school—the surprise of the Christian announcement came for him, invading his whole life. “When one unexpectedly sees something of extraordinary beauty, one cannot help but cry out, ‘Look there!’”

“AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH.”

How did this truth appear on my horizon in a way that it suddenly and unexpectedly embraced my life? I was a young seminarian in Milan, a good, obedient, exemplary boy. But, if I remember correctly what Concetto Marchesi says in his study of Latin literature, “art needs men who are moved, not men who are devout.” Art, that is, life—if it is to be creative, that is, if it is to be “alive”—needs men who are moved, not pious. And I had been a very devout seminarian, with the exception of an interval of a month during which the poet Leopardi gripped my attention more than Our Lord. Camus says in his *Notebooks*: “It is not by means of scruples that man will become great; greatness comes through the grace of God, like a beautiful day.”

For me, everything happened like the surprise of a “beautiful day,” when one of my high school teachers—I was then 15 years old—read and explained to us the prologue of the Gospel of St John. At that time in the seminary, it was obligatory to read that prologue at the end of every Mass. I had therefore heard it thousands of times. But the “beautiful day” came: everything is grace. As Adrienne von Speyr says, “Grace overwhelms us. That is its essence [grace is the Mystery which communicates itself; the essence of the Mystery’s communication is that it overwhelms us, fills us]. It does not illuminate point by point, but irradiates like the sun. The man upon whom God lavishes himself ought to be seized by vertigo in such a way that he sees only the light of God and no longer his own limits, his own weakness [for this reason, the attitude of those who are scandalized by the enthusiasm of a young person who has had the experience of the “beautiful day” is ignoble]. He

May 31st, 1945, Desio.
The day Fr. Luigi Giussani
celebrated his first Mass.

Venegono Inferiore (Varese) Archdiocesan Seminary. A group photo of the seminarians during their high school years (1938-1941), when Giussani experienced the "beautiful day." He is the front row, second from right.



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should renounce every equilibrium (sought by himself), he should give up the idea of a dialogue between himself and God as between two partners and become a simple receiver with arms spread wide yet unable to grasp, because the light runs through everything and remains intangible, representing much more than our own effort could receive." Forty years later, reading this passage from Von Speyr I understood what had happened to me then, when my teacher explained the first page of the Gospel of St John: "The Word of God, in other words, that of which everything was made, was made flesh," he said. "Therefore Beauty was made flesh, Goodness was made flesh, Justice was made flesh, Love, Life, Truth were made flesh. Being does not exist in a Platonic nowhere; it became flesh, it is one among us." And then I recalled a poem by Leopardi, a poem I had studied during that month of "escape" in my third year of high school, entitled: "To His Lady." It was a hymn not to one of Leopardi's many "loves," but to the discovery that he had unexpectedly made—at that summit of his life from which he would later decline—that what he had been seeking in the lady he loved was "something" beyond her, that was made visible in her, that

communicated itself through her, but was beyond her. This beautiful hymn to Woman ends with this passionate invocation: "If you, my love, are one / Of those undying forms the eternal mind / Will not transform to mortal flesh, to try funereal sorrows of ephemeral beings; / Or if you dwell in one / of those innumerable worlds far off / In the celestial swirl, / Lit by a sun more stunning than our own, / And if you breathe a kinder air than ours, / Then from this meager earth, / Where years are brief and dark, / This hymn your unknown lover sings, accept." In that instant I thought how Leopardi's words seemed, 1,800 years later, to be begging for something that had already happened and had been announced by St. John the Baptist: "The Word was made flesh." Not only had Being (Beauty, Truth) not disdained to clothe its perfection in flesh, and to bear the toils of this human life, but it had come to die for man. "He came to his own and His own received Him not"; He knocked on the door of His own home and was not recognized. That is the whole story. My life as a very young man was literally invaded by this; both as a memory that continually influenced my thought and as a stimulus to make me reevaluate the banality of everyday life. The pres-

ent moment, from then on, was no longer banal for me. Everything that existed—and therefore everything that was beautiful, true, attractive, fascinating, even as a possibility—found in that message its reason for being, as the certainty of a presence and a motivating hope which



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caused one to embrace everything. On my desk at the time, I had a picture of Christ by the Italian painter Carracci. Beneath the picture I had written a phrase from Möhler, the famous precursor of ecumenism whose “Symbolica” and other writings I had read at school: “I think that I could no longer live if I no longer heard Him speak.” Now, when I make my examination of conscience, I am compelled to beg Christ’s mercy, through

the compassion of Mary, that He make me return to the simplicity and courage of that time, because when such a “beautiful day” happens and one unexpectedly sees something of extraordinary beauty, one cannot help but speak about it to one’s friends. One cannot help but cry out: “Look there!” And that’s what happened. ■

(L. Giussani, *L'avvenimento cristiano* [The Christian event], pp. 30-33)

From dawn to dusk

With what outlook did
Giussani spend his days?
Some excerpts show how surprised
he was by the most common,
everyday circumstances.
From getting up in the morning
to suffering, from hearing the news
on TV to writing a friend...

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One morning I was going with my mother, who was going to Mass—as she did every morning—at five-thirty. It was a spring morning, still cold, but very clear. The whole sky was serenity itself. There was only one thing that inhabited the world: the morning star, the last to fall; it was so small as if it could illuminate everything; it was the sun that was beginning to conquer the darkness. That star was totally fixed in my eyes and in my heart. My mother, while I was looking, said to me, “How beautiful the world is, and how great is God!” It was one of the moments which holds the key to all of life: “How beautiful the world is, and how great is God!” “How beautiful the world is” means: “It is not useless to live, it is not useless to do things, to work, to suffer; dying is not something negative, because there is a destiny”: “How great is God!” That which is great is that to which everything flows: Destiny.

This is the heart: the relationship between reality as beauty and God as Destiny. These two points are like two fires, two poles between which the spark flies up: this spark is the heart. ■ (L. Giussani, “Beyond the Wall of Dreams,” in *CL_Communion & Liberation Magazine*, 1992, no. 1, p. 4)

It's everyday news. It starts at six a.m. when *Euronews* begins on TV. In thirty minutes, all serenity is dashed to the ground along with any hope for man's life. On the screen, news of two American boys committing a killing in a school and of a shooting with thirty people dead at a funeral in Georgia—and again, a few mornings ago, images of an earthquake in the Gualdo Tadino Stadium with its 1,500 football

fans; the same panic that assailed them passed through me as well. The compassion I feel for men and for myself was profoundly renewed. Every day on *Euronews* it seems that the only thing that can produce a heartrending cry from a crowd is sports—sports with stadiums instead of ancient cathedrals. These are the only places that are crowded, along with those offices that express the only real god of

today's society: money (we wrestle continuously in the face of *power*: but that power is money, i.e., the Milan Stock Exchange, New York Stock Exchange, London Stock Exchange, etc.)

Yet so many times, all the *power* in place, in its impotence, seems not to offer even a hint of hope for the people. So that when men look at the horizon, and the sky, they are bound to be afraid. And even the



1985, Milan.

wisest men in the world—the gurus—those who pass as inspiring the truth of man and the welfare of the people, do not know what to do. Norberto Bobbio must admit that all ideals, including the Italian Communist Party, collapse. That is why the world calls Christ the man who crucifies mankind.

Where can we still find the foundation for a hope that can draw man into relationships in which a truth of love is possible? “Almighty God, look upon humanity lying prostrate in its mortal weakness, and let it come back to life through the passion of your only Son.”

The only source of hope is Christ on the cross: “To gather the peoples / in the covenant of love, / stretch out your arms / on the wood of the cross.” The only source of hope—and the source from which a happiness unthinkable and above all unattainable in other forms or from other sources becomes possible—is the happiness that built the medieval throng, with its various levels of conception—theoretical and ethical—of the person and society, including power, which could not avoid, as its ultimate goal, the love and good of people, in the light of an awareness of its own limitation; that is, of the sense of mystery. ■ (L. Giussani, *L’io, il potere, le opere* [The “I”, power, works], pp. 263-65)



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Getting up in the morning, drinking your coffee, taking the commuter train, going to work or tidying up the house, making the beds, sweeping, taking down the spiderwebs, eating, taking the commuter train again, going home, talking with people. This is time that passes. The “how” of time that passes, the heart of time that passes, and, therefore, the value, the meaning of time that passes, is given by prayer, because if prayer is the waiting for His return, and His return is the substance of everything, then it is precisely in prayer that the “how” of time that passes happens. ■ (L. Giussani, “God is Mercy”, from *Traces*, 2007, no. 3)

1975, Varigotti.



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In front of my window I have trees that are still destroyed by the winter frost and cold. Observing them, I thought that all things, all our things, would end up the same way if it were not for that force, that creative power that reawakens other trees in front of me with new, green leaves.

This mysterious force chose to make itself seen, making itself familiar to our journey as women and men. So, to each of us, the power of God says, “I am with you. I have become a woman’s child, just as you are one’s child [...], I have lived what you have lived, I was unjustly condemned, I suffered pain, I was killed and I accepted all this so that you would understand that I participate in the toil that I have called you to do.” (...) If a person had never before seen the springtime

and were born and had lived and known only the aridity of the winter, could she imagine how from within, from this strange and mysterious “within,” all things can change? She would be incapable of imagining it. The presence of Jesus of Nazareth is like the sap that from within—mysteriously but certainly—regreens our aridity and makes the impossible possible: what is not possible for us is not impossible for God. So a barely hinted-at new humanity, for those who have sincere eyes and heart, makes itself visible through the companionship of those who recognize Him as present, God-with-us. A barely hinted-at humanity, new, like the regreening of bitter and arid nature. ■ (L. Giussani, “Il nuovo inizio dei figli di Dio” [The new beginning of the children of God], in *la Repubblica*, March 30, 1997, in *Tracce*, 1997, n.4)

What helps us in this history is asking God, when you wake up, every morning when you wake up. That's why I insist on the *Angelus*. You must get used to saying the *Angelus*, because it is a reminder of the moment everything began. It is a recollection of the moment when what is happening in the

present moment began. Because man starts from the present. He can't start from the past. If he starts from the present, he will see that the past confirms this present. The past gives reasons for this present, and the strength of this present makes it possible to judge the past. Say the *Angelus* well. "May it happen to me accord-

ing to Thy word," in the relationships with all the people at work, in the relationships with all the people you'll see on the subway or on the street, in the relationships with things, with the rain that annoys you, or with the sun that is too hot—you need to ask. ■ (L. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 1, *Faith*, pp. 50-51)

After eating a very simple spaghetti dish with garlic and pepper, one October he said to the Memores Domini living in his house with him in Gudo Gambaredo, "Such goodness! Although I wouldn't be able to say this if there hadn't been a Goodness at the origins. God endowed us with an ability to adhere, that is pleasure, enjoyment. That is why whosoever is not educated in pleasure cannot be free." And thinking of all the people who followed him, he added, "Unless people, even adults, pass through the experience of joy, they will end up understanding nothing." ■ (A. Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, p. 1018)

Imeasure thoughts and actions, moods and reactions, days and nights. But profound company and complete Witness are an Other Presence. This is the long journey that we must take together. This

is the real adventure: the discovery of that Presence in our blood and bones, the immersion of our being with that Presence; that is, Holiness. Which is the true social endeavor, too. (...) we need to follow,

with courage and faithfulness, the symptoms provided by the complex of conditions in which we come to find ourselves. We have no need of anything else. ■ (A. Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, p. 372)

Casa San Francesco in Varigotti lies a bit above the town and behind the beach. The view from its garden overlooks the sea beyond the gulf. Just below, one can see the houses of the little town and the beach with its marina. Looking away from the beach and up beyond the garden, one can see the ancient tower and the little medieval church of San Lorenzo on a cliff overlooking the sea. Most probably Giussani was sitting in that garden, wherein there is a little statue of a Madonna in a corner, when he took pen and paper in hand to write his friend Majo, "You are exactly like this sea—immense and mysterious—which you always hear speak its mysterious, deep thought, which you understand but cannot repeat to yourself with comprehensible and decisive words.

This sea, which now is calm and every now and then you hear gasp along the shoreline, seemingly dreaming, and after a few hours becomes all troubled and breathless and heated and you don't know why [...] but calm or upset, quiet or enraged, every day and every instant the sea has a lowest common denominator, a foundational, unique, and unrelenting meaning, which is its greatness: an overwhelming sense of an enormous aspiration for the infinite, the infinite mystery. [...] Such is your life: in the anguished or peaceful vicissitudes, which—apparently with no reason—suddenly chase you, there is a voice, a passion, an agony that lies at the bottom of it all—and it is the voice, the passion, the anxiety for Him: Happiness, Beauty, Supreme Goodness." ■ (A. Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, pp. 116-17)

Giussani's days that summer were tinged with suffering: muscle cramps and spasms, stomach problems, and difficulty breathing. One evening in June, after a long string of particularly grueling hours, Jone heard him exclaim, "What a bad day!" But immediately he added, "But if I live this day with a yearning to go through and experience these circumstances, living the occasions that the Mystery allows, I am certain I will walk better and more quickly towards the Destiny I will one day see, much better than I would walk according to all my own plans for living this day. For this reason this day is beautiful because it is true." ■

(A. Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, p. 1127)

I am not capable in this windy and dark evening, the beginning of winter, to respond to the precise mood in which you wrote me. I'm too tired. But I only feel—and my faithfulness to my dearest friends is living proof—that the substance of life, of aspirations, of happiness, is love. An infinite love, enormous, which bent down to my nothingness, drew out a human being, a speck of dust in its body, limitless in its eager openness to truth and love, which is intelligence and heart. An infinite Love, enormous, that did the absurd of rendering me—finite dust as a created being—infinite like Him. [...] Personal friend of the Infinite; you are dust, but you are sea." ■ (L. Giussani, *Lettere di fede e di amicizia ad Angelo Majo* [Letters of faith and friendship to Angelo Majo], pp. 51–52)

Reciting the canticle *Nunc dimittis* at night prayer is moving, because being able to tell the Lord that he is the savior, that he exists as he already exists, "snatches" grace in spite of our evil and lets us go—like old Simeon—in peace. It is like a child saying before going to bed to his dad, "Daddy, you are my daddy"—whatever fault he may have committed during the day, even an instant before, that child, with his own words, would affirm the truth most corresponding to the heart and reality that can be imagined: you are my daddy. ■ (L. Giussani, *Tutta la terra desidera il Tuo volto* [All the earth desires Your gaze], p. 167)



1988, Rimini. Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of CL.



A living thought

We spoke with Fr. Alberto Cozzi about the inheritance of Fr. Giussani—a theology born of experience, the search for “creative” words, and the adventure of freedom.



Paola Bergamini

“I was in high school, and my sister brought me to Catholic University to attend a lesson by Fr. Giussani. Sitting in a corner of the super-crowded main lecture hall, I was impressed by the flurry of questions and provocations from the students, which he answered forcefully, concerned not so much to persuade as to have them perceive an effective word for their lives. That was my first encounter with Fr. Giussani. Shortly after that, I entered the seminary in Venegono, where I spent the most beautiful three years of my life. Then I was sent to Rome to become a theologian.” So began Fr. Alberto Cozzi, who was born in 1963, when we met in Milan in his office at the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy, where he was the president of the Higher Institute of Religious Sciences until September. In 2002, after eleven years teaching Christology in Venegono, he became the parish priest in Galliate Lombardo in the Varese province, where some families of the Movement live. “My closeness with them was helpful for my studies of Fr. Giussani.”

His talk at the Meeting of Rimini during the presentation of the book *Il cristianesimo come avvenimento. Saggi*

sul pensiero teologico di Giussani [Christianity as event: Essays on the theological thought of Giussani], which he co-authored, was in some regards a surprise. Usually the word “theology” seems to imply something high, too high, with little relevance to “normal” life. Instead, in the “story” of his studies, Fr. Cozzi shared with us Giussani’s intense tension toward living. Our dialogue began with this second “encounter” of his, as a theologian.

What aspect of Fr. Giussani’s theological thought struck you?

I return to that first impression in the lecture hall. Giussani perceived that in order to be sincere and honest with themselves and with life, young people had to use words in such a way that they compared them with their own “I,” that is, perceiving the original meaning of the words in relationship to their experience. During the lesson, he pressed them to define what they meant by faith and reason. He wanted them to have the instruments for understanding and judging what he taught. He sought “creative” (not esoteric) words



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A room in the digital exhibit created for the Centenary.

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Focus
on the QR Code
to visit it

to express his inquiry into the nature of the human. In his writings about Niebuhr, he said that his idea of theology was bound to life because it is the holistic and critical awareness of an experience. It is no coincidence that in his still-open inquiry into the word, he compared his ideas with those of theologians like Ratzinger and von Balthasar. He wanted to get to the heart of experience.

For example?

Let's take the word "obedience." Giussani said that it is openness to the work of an Other. It is not a hierarchy that imposes itself, much less a system, but rather the perception that the affirmation of myself passes through the acknowledgment of an Other. Within this existential posture, I find my "I." Giussani specified that this is possible if I keep my eye on His presence, because it enables me to see the other and to perceive all that person's richness. It is an interesting dynamic. But there is another word that I believe expresses it well: sacrifice.

Could you try to explain?

In love as acknowledgment of the other there is sacrifice. The measure of the love is not just well-being; there is a dynamic of hospitality that asks for a step back from my needs and demands.

“In Giussani there is a perception of the Risen One, of walking with Christ, that enables me to say, even in the most painful situations, that I’ll take this thing because I receive it from God.”

Why is this worthwhile?

Because the human person does not possess herself. This is Giussani’s great intuition, or “obsession,” I’d call it. *“I am You who make me.”* The human person is continuously located between the mystery and the world, from the latter of which the person is inclined to derive his or her self-understanding (thinking that we are the fruit of pure mechanical chance is easier to live with). The “I” is caught between these two poles. Giussani added that this condition is experienced within circumstances.

Are circumstances the point of encounter between the mystery and the world?

Yes, I am the place where the human person must engage her own “I.” It is a movement of being. This is quite different from adapting to the ideology that asserts that I have discovered the human person and I deduce her. Let’s return to the idea of mechanical chance. Giussani held the exact opposite. His thought is fascinating in this way because it puts into action the adventure of freedom; that is, it puts into action the human.

In what sense?

As a human person, with this irreducible “I” set in front of the

mystery within the experience of circumstances such as work, relationships, and projects, I engage with my whole being to give meaning to what I live. For example, I don’t “act” as a father—I become a father. I don’t “act” as a husband—I become a husband.

In order for this to happen, Giussani said, there has to be an encounter.

This is another theologically important “word” that expresses his existential tension or striving, and it angers modern thinkers. There is no rule or law to apply because in order to find myself an encounter must happen, something “fortuitous.” This is the challenge Giussani articulated in his provocative dialogue with Niebuhr and other theologians of the time. It is the method of God: He offers us an encounter in history in which He makes Himself present because Christ is risen in the church and provokes me to the point that I engage my “I.” This same dynamic happens, for example, when people fall in love: it awakens energy and affection they never thought they had. This happens in many circumstances in life—in the decision to become a physician or engineer, or in carrying out a project or relationships.

Can we say that the encounter with Christ opens our eyes to other events?

Or better, it keeps them open to the promise they contain, which the “blows” of life tend to undermine. This is possible, as Giussani said, because the presence of Christ is a provocation, in the sense that it keeps active a sense of gratitude and a perception of the hundredfold of affection and involvement. Giussani spoke of fruitfulness: you realize that an encounter with Christ makes you generative. You don’t necessarily do great things, but every aspect of life contains a promise that is renewed. The theologian Karl Barth said that an encounter with Christ made his life a place of masterpieces. As a priest I see the masterpieces that God brings about in many brothers and sisters. I study the work of God in others’ lives—this, too, is part of Giussani’s thought!

At the Meeting, you quoted Mario Vittorino, who said “When I encountered Christ, I realized that I was a human person.” You said that Giussani left us an anthropology of faith as an experience that has to do with the human.

The provocation of being a human person is always the same in every era. However, today some theories,



Fr. Alberto Cozzi, born in 1963, is a professor at the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy.

such as transhumanism, ask us to return to thinking of ourselves as animals able to make a leap in evolution through things like technology. After all, if all it takes is a virus to shatter every desire, project and relationship, it's better to drop the exorbitant claim that the "I" is irreducible. We return to the same point: everything is reduced to the ideology of extemporaneous well-being, of emotions. In contrast, the self-awareness Giussani urged is to be honest and sincere with yourself because we are in relationship with the infinite. This is as true for a theologian as it is for a homemaker. In an encounter with Christ the human person seeks to discover her identity, creating intersections of meaning between herself and the world. It is an experience; that is, a journey to per-

ceive the signs that open to the true needs of the heart, finding a correspondence between yourself and the world. This is the problem that I observe in youth culture.

Could you explain this?

The media fill their lives with opinions, emotions, and conflicts, but young people lack signs that touch the "I." When you talk with them about the war, the problem of ecology, about how things are going in the world, it is interesting to ask: Where are you? In doing so, their needs for beauty, justice, and truth ("notitia Dei," as Saint Augustine called them) come to the surface and kindle the intuition of the "You who make me." This is what makes you get out of bed in the morning and face the day. I would add one more element—Giussani's very concrete pedagogy.

Which is?

In the grace of an encounter with Christ, the companionship of the Christian community is what enables you to verify experience. It is Catholic realism, the antithesis of the Protestant psychologism he had studied so deeply. I said pedagogy because in Giussani there is a listening to the word of Jesus, a perception of the Risen One, of walking with Christ, that enables me to say, even in the most painful situations, that I'll take this thing because I receive it from God. Giussani said that when you are in front of the mystery as destiny, the most sensible thing to say is "You." In this you feel totally free. So then, prayer is the begging for, the radical invocation of this "You" present.

Today, what is the strongest contribution of the thought of Giussani?

He had the genius of transmitting the faith by living it, causing others to live it, and of enriching those to whom he had transmitted it. Maybe these are only a few of the aspects of his "secret." In any case, it is an inheritance that should absolutely be understood beyond the bounds of the Movement. ■

Close-up

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USA

Discovering life

1964, Varigotti.



Aaron Richies

A theologian who met Fr. Giussani's thought and then met a young boy, both of them shaking his faith and life. Leading to a proposal of a university course on the Italian priest.

When Fr. Carrón announced the centenary of the birth of Fr. Giussani, he proposed that we take a personal interest in the gesture for a single and essential reason: “To witness what Fr. Giussani has generated in us.” I was provoked to consider what difference the charism had generated in me. What in my “I” exists now wholly on account of the gift of the presence of Jesus Christ that has passed to me through the life of this Milanese priest?—a man I never knew, who died the year I was received into the Catholic Church? How did it pass from him to me?

I first heard of the Movement in the autumn of 2005. I was living in England, where I had just begun studying for my doctorate in theology at the University of Nottingham. My thesis director, Professor John Milbank, had just met the archbishop of Granada, Msgr. Javier Martínez, and was becoming friends with people from Communion and Liberation at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore.

Out of curiosity, I had bought and skimmed Fr. Giussani’s *The Risk of Education*. I certainly did not understand what Communion and Liberation was, but I was becoming inter-

ested, especially in how in it there seemed to be some way of living the faith that was connected to theologians I was studying, like De Lubac, Ratzinger, and Balthasar.

The real meeting happened in 2009 when Alessandra Grolin, who was teaching philosophy at Cattolica, sent one of her students to Nottingham to study with John Milbank for a semester. She asked me to help find this student a place to stay. I was not prepared for the way this young Italian

would conquer me and my family. Michelangelo Mandorlo was in his early 20s when he arrived in Nottingham. When he came I was an adjunct teacher of theology at the university. I had published some articles in theology journals and was preparing to defend my PhD thesis. My wife, Melissa, and I had one child, Basil, and Melissa was pregnant with our second, Edith. Melissa and I were both converts to the Catholic Church, me from atheism via Anglicanism (I was baptized two

“What in my ‘I’ exists now wholly on account of the gift of the presence of Jesus Christ that has passed to me through the life of this Milanese priest?—a man I never knew, who died the year I was received into the Catholic Church? How did it pass from him to me?”

years before I became Catholic in an Anglican Church) and she from the Protestantism in which she was raised. By 2009, Melissa and I found ourselves in England having already made an unexpected and singular journey of faith. Our histories, my studies in theology, the fact that we were now parents and more than a decade older than Michelangelo should have given us an authority in matters of faith and life. But our encounter with him clarified the opposite! Michelangelo initiated us on a path of relearning the faith from zero. Through the encounter with him we discovered “familiarity with the mystery,” the inner experience of the efficacy God willed by taking human flesh.

Michelangelo was a different kind of Catholic. He was not pious, yet he prayed with more devotion than anyone I had met up until that point. He got real joy out of smoking his toscanos, drinking beer and singing, goofing around with our young son, but also out of cooking and doing the dishes. He did all these things with an immediacy and intensity that signified that for him they all had great value for his person and for his friends. And all of this (smoking, cooking, friends—everything) seemed for him somehow intimately connected with going to Mass. This remarkable young man overcame us. He really appreciated who we were and wanted to know about our history.

Michelangelo was whole and gladly alive. He brought us to his family home in Rimini, and we met the same in his parents. Through him my history, which had seemed to me at the time fragmented and compartmentalized, began to take on the clarity of a new unity. Without a single discourse, Michelangelo showed me (almost unawares) the profound and exceptional reason that knit

together the seemingly disjunctive moments of life into a single pattern of dramatic importance. He did this not least by teaching me to sing and play guitar again (something I had abandoned after my conversion to Christianity). And one of the songs he taught me to sing was Claudio Chieffo’s “La Strada”: “Porto con me le mie canzoni / Ed una storia cominciata / È veramente grande Dio / È grande questa nostra vita.” (I carry with me my songs / and a story that has begun / God is truly great / and great is this life of ours). This line unlocked something inside me. It clarified that everything I carried within was rooted in a single story, a history that belongs to God and is my life.

When he arrived in Nottingham, Michelangelo began to do School of Community every week with some friends: it would meet in our living room, and because we were his friends we were invited. He discovered there was a Polish woman named Ania who lived in Nottingham who was from the Fraternity. There was also an Italian, Dario, who worked during the week at Rolls-Royce in Derby. At the first Nottingham School of Community we were six: Michelangelo, Ania and her husband Marek, Dario, and Melissa and me.

The experience of wholeness the School of Community generated led me to recognize it as my own, as something more intimate to me than I was to myself. The gesture and company it entailed gave flesh to the most fascinating ideas of Giussani and made them *facts* in my life. Michelangelo, after he became the godfather to my daughter, Edith, entered the Cascinazza monastery outside of Milan, where today he is a Benedictine monk. In the same period we moved to Spain, where Msgr. Martínez invited me to teach at his seminary and join his recently estab-

Aaron Richies, born in 1974, is a theologian of Canadian origin. He teaches at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, where he lives with his wife and five children.



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lished Instituto de Filosofía “Edith Stein.” In his paternal gaze the experience of the Movement that began for us in Nottingham continued in exactly the same way.

The passing of the charism cannot for me be distinguished from my vocation as an educator. In a certain sense I learned how to teach by immersing myself in what I have learned from Giussani, however imperfectly I communicate it. I often say to people that whatever good I do in the classroom is entirely due to the debt I owe to the School of Community. I have discovered that, in order to communicate anything true and worthwhile, in order to be at all compelling to my students, I have to adhere to the insistence on experience Fr. Giussani proposed.

In 2015, as soon as the Spanish translation of Alberto Savorana’s biography was published, I read the intro-

duction at once, until I gave up and started simply reading around in the biography in fits and starts. That changed with Carrón’s proposal of the centenary, which touched me at a particular moment. We had moved to the U.S. and I had been asked by Fr. José Medina to lead the Atchison School of Community, which had already set me in front of the question of my responsibility for the charism. How was I, inadequate as I know I am, able to take responsibility in this way for the Movement in this place?

I knew that the first step would be to encounter Savorana’s big book. And that is when it crossed my mind: Why not do a class based on Fr. Giussani’s biography?

I proposed it to my chair at Benedictine College, Dr. Jamie Blosser. Jamie welcomed the idea of the class but asked that I do it as a Senior Theology Seminar. This would mean that most of the CLU students I expected to fill the class and help me read the book would not be able to take it (not being *both* theology ma-

“I often say that whatever good I do in the classroom is entirely due to the debt I owe to the School of Community. I have discovered that, in order to communicate anything true I have to adhere to the insistence on experience Fr. Giussani proposed.”

jors and seniors). With them, we decided to meet once a week in order to read the biography together. And so, a secondary and spontaneous “coffee shop class” happened and as the semester went on it attracted students who were not of the CLU.

The official class met twice a week. On Tuesday, before we discussed the section of the biography we had read for that day, each student would have the opportunity to give a presentation on one of the chapters of *Christ, God’s Companionship with Man*. On Thursdays, we would begin class by reading aloud Giussani’s liner notes for a piece of music from *Spirto Gentil*, and then listen to that piece before turning again to the section of the biography we had prepared. The exception to this rhythm occurred at two points in the semester when we read *Tidings Brought to Mary* and *Miguel Mañara*.

Maybe the best way of beginning to see what happened in the official class is to read an email I received just after the final exam from one of the students: “There is no class that I have taken in college that has more impacted my day-to-day spiritual life and overall outlook on the Faith than this encounter with Christ through Giussani. This class ripped open my heart to Him in a way that I’ve never experienced. Thank you for giving me this oppor-

tunity, and know that in my teaching, I will live in the spirit of Christ through Giussani and share this encounter with my students for years to come. R.”

I think that summarizes what many of students discovered. It is surprising to learn a new way of looking at Christ, to learn to see Him again for the first time. This is the great utility the students discovered in Giussani: he freed them to look at the difficulties, disaffections, boredoms, monotonies, sins, and sufferings of life—a range of human experience that too often is compartmentalized, as if it falls outside the embrace of Jesus. There they found the newness of the event of the encounter. The question that most struck the students was the way Giussani really bets boldly on the goodness of *all* of reality and insists that it is always and only *there* that He can be encountered. Every cry for Christ is already a sign of His presence and a tension that sets the human “I” on the road toward the destiny that is Him. This was highlighted by a student who focused on the surprising way Giussani faced his final suffering with Parkinson’s. She said in our last class: “He has this certainty that what’s being given to him is gift. He saw this gift in the nurses around him and in his friends and in people he barely knew. So, the thing that I want, that I take from this class is that I [too] want to see everything as gift.” ■

To Give One's Life for the Work of Another

LUIGI GIUSSANI

Edited by Julián Carrón

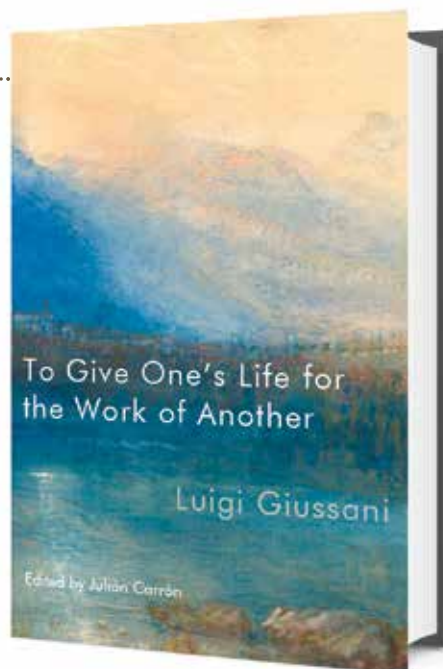
Some of Father Luigi Giussani's most poignant teachings, available in print for the first time.

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.

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