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COMMUNION AND LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

# TRACES

4

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LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



## THE THINGS THAT WE SEE

How does faith help us to live? A trip to Uganda and Kenya to discover that a new humanity can flourish in every circumstance.

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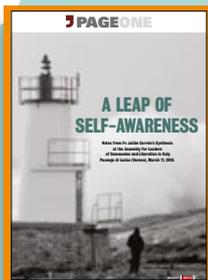
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Notes from Fr. Julián Carrón's Synthesis at the Assembly for Leaders of Communion and Liberation in Italy.

## CLOSE UP / AFRICA

# "I CAN SAY THAT I WAS BORN THAT DAY"

The stories told by the college students, the death of a young father and his wife's witness, and the Muslim women who've encountered Christianity...



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# JULIÁN CARRÓN

## *Disarming Beauty*

ESSAYS ON FAITH, TRUTH, AND FREEDOM

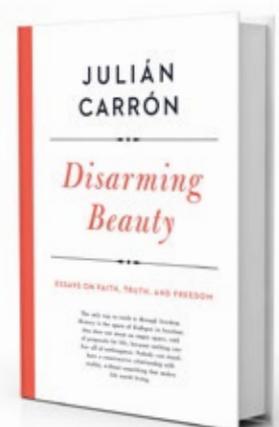


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# THE FACTS BEFORE OUR EYES

**W**e have our ideas, sometimes even correct ones, perhaps forged over years of observation and in-depth study of things that, at a certain point, in one way or another, we think we “know.” And then we have the facts, those things that continually happen before our eyes and that stubbornly continue to get through to us in spite of ourselves. They could be small ones—an unexpected encounter, a thoughtful judgment from a person from whom you might not expect it—or big ones, like the sudden death of a friend.

Often, these facts lead to a fork in the road. And if you really think about it, this is almost always the case even if we don’t realize it. In the face of such events, we can decide to follow their initial impact on us, giving that instant of surprise we felt space to grow, allowing them to lead us to discover something that’s truly new. Alternatively, we can immediately put up our defenses, deadening the impact of facts by forcing everything to fit into the frameworks we already have in mind. We often go down this second road, but what happens when we instead decide to stay open to them? What happens when what prevails, even for only an instant, is that childlike wonder that the facts stubbornly continue to give us as a gift?

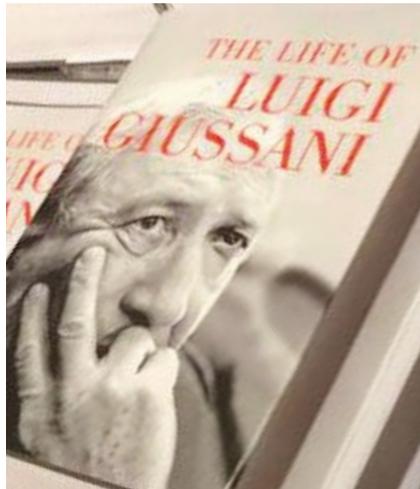
**The articles you will find** in this *Traces* include an example that responds to that question, Fr. Ignacio Carbajosa’s account of his recent trip to Uganda and Kenya. This “50-year-old European priest” and “man of reason,” as he self-deprecatingly describes himself, is about how he grapples with a witness that blows him away again and again. His is the story of that constant comparison of “what happens” with “ready-made reflections,” to use his words once again: it is a comparison of the surprising facts scattered throughout the days he spent with the CL communities in those countries with his ideas, with what he “already knew.” The article is a description of what happens in our hearts when what wins out are the facts; in other words, the method God has always used for the conversion of our hearts.

**In the end, this is the name of the game** we all play every day, in the heart of Africa or in Latin America, in the fields of Lombardy, or in the minutia of our lives, right where we are. It’s the tension between what we have in mind and the Mystery working before us, inviting us to follow Him. Which is better for us? T

# REFLECTION

## FROM MILAN TO NEW ZEALAND

 *The Life of Luigi Giussani* has truly accompanied me in these days. I waited for its translation for a long time but it was worth the wait. I find myself really savoring it, and in spite of the sheer size of the volume, I wish it would never end. I feel that I'm going deeper into my understanding of the Movement. Obviously, the Movement was already important to me, since it has touched my life in its most personal aspects. But reading *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, I find myself digging deeper into the "roots" from which the Movement has sprung forth, like someone who has a beautiful fruit tree in his



garden and enjoys its fruit, but who doesn't know the tree's origin, who planted it and through bad weather it has endured. It is moving to follow

the path of Fr. Giussani's life in a particular moment in history and to see how his "yes" to Christ coincides with the working of the Holy Spirit. I feel such immense gratitude in seeing the events that happened in his life, full of meaning for the future, and how he followed with the spirit of obedience, even though he didn't yet know the consequences. In reading about the events in Milan during the 1950's, 60's, and 70's, I can't help but see a promise of what one day would find me in New Zealand in the 1990's. Keeping in mind the concept of the universal dimension of the Movement as a gift to modern man, I was moved this morning as I read about Giussani's meeting with Pope John Paul II on September 29, 1984. In this audience, the Pope conferred upon Fr. Giussani and the Movement the mandate to go into the whole the world. This morning I read about Fr. Giussani's answer in the days following the audience. It was a huge task, accompanied by the awareness of his limitations and those of the Movement, but full of hope in obedience to the Church and to the task itself. Here in Ashburton, we are all well. Our days are full of the novelty that a new life brings. Miriam is now three months old, at home with her three older brothers. She's like a delicate flower that grows in the jungle. On page 656, in reading Fr. Giussani's words, "There is a nice group going to Ireland," I felt a great affection for the names and faces and for the providential time I spent there.

**Matthew, Ashburton  
(New Zealand)**

## AT THE HOSPITAL

### THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING I HAVE

In these last few months, I have been decisively changed by a relationship with a friend of mine. We met because our oldest children go to the same school. From the very beginning, I felt a curiosity about and fondness toward him and wanted to see him again, to get to know him better, so we began to spend some evenings together. A few years have passed and we have become such good friends that last year he came to the Spiritual Exercises. A few months later, I became ill, and was so close to death that at the hospital they called me "Lazarus." After two days, my wife brought me the phone and among the many messages, there was one from my great friend. "While you were in surgery, I promised the Lord that whatever happened to you, I would continue to walk the path we are following together." He came to see me in the ICU, and with a smile on his face and with eyes that couldn't contain their joy, he gave me a large envelope as a gift. I opened it up and it was a large-print version of the Exercises of the Fraternity. He said, "I brought you the most beautiful and cherished thing I have: enjoy it!" To see the miracle of my friend's conversion has also converted me, and from a human perspective has corresponded to me more than the miracle of my healing.

**Beppe, Italy**

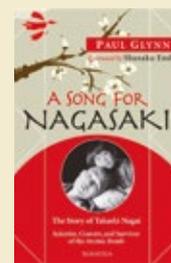


## THE QUESTIONS AFTER THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

 At the CLU Spiritual Exercises I was struck by the questions that arose after we listened to the witnesses. The dominant question was, “What is the meaning of my life?” I was greatly disturbed by this question throughout the Exercises and I felt I had to answer it, so that I can know who God is and the role He plays in my life. But I realized that the answer could only be found through an experience, which could only happen with time, and that all I could do was pray. After the retreat, I was talking to a friend who is not in the Movement, and I told him that I feared death because of the uncertainties of the world beyond. He responded by saying that he was scared of dying before accomplishing his purpose in life. From all that he said, I realized that truly the life we are living has a purpose, and that our lives are given to us by our Creator. The next day, the CLU students had an assembly to discuss what we had witnessed during the Exercises. Two of the key questions posed by our responsible were “Where do our needs in life come from? Who satisfies these needs in one way or another?” God is the answer to both, although I think we have to go on our own journey to verify this. After the assembly, it was raining and I was talking to Nicholas, a friend from the Movement. We spoke briefly about the assembly, but mostly focused on general things. As I went to my hostel that night, I thought about

## KNEELING

I’ve almost finished reading the book of the month, *A Song for Nagasaki*. At a certain point, the protagonist says, “We should try to be grateful that Nagasaki was chosen as a sacrifice pleasing to God.” What is more realistic than a position such as this? Last Sunday, at Mass I was struck by the position of the person kneeling in front of me. I have always thought of kneeling as being just a sign of respect, or at most, a sign of submission. For the first time, seeing that man kneeling on the ground with his head bent, certain renderings from iconography came to mind and I understood that this gesture is meant to say, “Here I am. I am ready to give my life for You as, in this moment, You are doing for me.” Now, I won’t be able to help thinking of this at the moment of the Consecration.



**Livio, Italy**



our conversation and realized that I was not as happy as I had been in our previous conversation where we had talked about Christ and the events happening in our lives. I asked myself why this was so. We had been rained on after the assembly and my clothes were still soaking wet when I returned to the hostel. Surprisingly, though, I felt content and happy and I wanted

to know the reason for this; how could I feel happy after being rained on? I later discovered that it is because Christ fulfills me. He is the answer to my questions and He reaches me through the faces of other people. I realized that He is the one who gives meaning to my life. I pray that the lesson from the Spiritual Exercises, that we are seen by Christ, will enable us every day to see Him as Zaccheus did, despite his limitations. Our task now is to keep knocking at His door like the Unnamed in Manzoni’s novel, with the poverty of a child seeking its mother, so that the encounter that happened in our lives may happen in each instant. We should never tire of doing this.

**Yvonne, Nairobi (Kenya)**



**“I WAS BORN  
THAT DAY”**



**The stories told by the students, the death of a young father and his wife's witness, and the Muslim women who've encountered Christianity... Perspectives from a Spanish priest after visiting Kampala and spending time with college students in Kenya. Tales of facts and encounters that break through our ideas.**

BY IGNACIO CARBAJOSA

I arrived in Kampala a few days before the start of the Spiritual Exercises I preached for college students from all over Africa, which took place February 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>. There, I found a community reeling from the sudden death of Francesco Frigero, an Italian who was well-loved by everyone, in a car accident. Just a few months before, he had helped us out with the CLU vacation in Uganda. He left behind a wife and three young children. This opened up a lot of questions for the students there, as I saw in the messages I received leading up to the Exercises. They told me the story of a new humanity that began to show itself in Sara, Francesco's wife, who sustained the community with her certainty that "Francesco now sits at the heavenly banquet with our Lord." I heard their witnesses of how they came together in vigil before his body was sent to Italy for burial. They told me about the carpenter who had worked with Francesco who, hearing the songs and seeing a serenity and strange joy during the wake, asked, "Don't you cry in Italy when someone dear to you dies?" One of those present answered him, "In Italy, we despair in front of death. What you're seeing is something exceptional. It's called faith."

With these facts before my eyes, and with a desire to address the questions the young people posed about death, I went to the International Meeting Point to meet "Rose's women." After an hour of singing and dancing, I asked them, "You say that you are free. Meeting Rose freed you. You knew Francesco well; he built the Luigi Giussani Primary and High School. For you, what is death? In other words, what does it mean for you to live?" I was surprised by the response of Teddy, a woman who started from her self-awareness rather than a theory about death. She



said, "There is One who is making me in every instant. He is the master of life, so you can have faith even in the face of death." I took notes. If what we live in every instant has nothing to do with death, we'll live like everyone else and be left with explanations that don't satisfy anyone.

**ON THEIR KNEES.** We had dinner at the *Memores Domini* house with three Muslim women who participate in the Meeting Point. They told us about how they "devour" *Traces* the second it arrives in Kampala and how they help the other women out in zealously selling the magazine [see page 12]. One of them, who was preparing to be baptized at the Easter vigil, told the story of her conversion. As she spoke, I started to feel a little uneasy, looking at the two other Muslim women. It was my Europe-

an mentality at work: "Won't they feel bad, since they're still Muslim?..." By the end of the evening, their faces had broken through my thoughts: they were so happy.

As we said our good-byes, I looked in on a striking scene: the two Muslim women were on their knees in front of Rose. The next day, I asked her the meaning of the gesture. "It's an expression of gratitude. As if to say, 'May we stay here always; don't abandon us,'" Rose told me. And then she went on to tell me about all the things that I, the wise "man of reason," didn't see. Those women were so happy to be able to come to her house, sit at the same table with white people, eat the same food on the same plates, to be served and be able to participate in the conversation, and even happier that we took an interest in them. They had tru-



The Ugandan community's vacation at the end of January.

ly discovered the value of their lives there. Before, they looked at themselves as others had: in their regular environment, black Muslim women are considered second-class. Those simple things, which were possible at Rose's house, were unthinkable for them before. We were used to it, but for them, they were signs of a new, different humanity. One that brings us to our knees in awe.

**“GOOD AFTERNOON.”** The next day, we had lunch at the home of a girl from the CLU who lived in a slum. She wanted us to celebrate with her her passing to the next level in school. Our visit was a real event for her: “Auntie” Rose, Father Nacho, and their friends came to see her! We came to her humble home (“humble” falls short of describing that small room which houses

five people). Everyone in the slum watched our strange entourage. “Where are they going?” Her look answered them: “To my house!” As we would be reminded during the Exercises, that young woman felt like Zacchaeus: today, salvation had entered her house. “He was seen and therefore saw,” was the title of the retreat.

After an 11-hour journey, we arrived the next day in Eldoret, Kenya, for the Exercises. The reflections I gave were enriched by the questions and witnesses from the students, as well as by what I had seen in my time in Kampala. It was easy to illustrate “being seen”: many of them seem to still be in the sycamore tree, being seen by “Auntie” Rose. One girl spoke about her life before climbing that tree. Everything was against her; she hated everything, even the day she'd been born. As well as God. No one loved her as she was. She had tried to commit suicide three times. She saw her brother, however, facing the same circumstances at home (an alcoholic father, among other things) in a different way. So she agreed to go with him to School of Community. This is how she described it: “It was the second week of the second semester of my first year in high school [*described with the precision of the encounter John and Andrew had with Christ: it was four in the afternoon*]. I went to the foyer where they hold School of Community, and I was early. ‘Auntie’ Rose came in and saw me there. She fixed me with her gaze—she normally does this with new people—and I felt my heart beating fast. Then, her gaze softened

and she smiled at me. She bid me, ‘Good afternoon.’ I was so in shock and felt so small that I didn't manage to respond. But that gaze left me speechless. In my whole life, no one has ever smiled at me that way. It was such a piercing gaze that it broke down the walls of my past and opened wide the present in front of me. It was a gaze that told me that I, too, can be loved exactly as I am. As if it said to me, ‘You are important.’ I heard Someone calling me to follow Him through that gaze. From that moment on, I decided to follow. I felt like I had found the place I belong. I can say that God's grace reached me when I was 14 years old. I can say that I was ‘born’ when I was 14, because that

**“Rose told me about all the things that I, the wise ‘man of reason,’ didn't see.”**

was the moment in which I understood the true meaning of my life. I started to understand who God is for me, and the great chasm between me and my origin was bridged. The Movement gave me back myself, which I had lost. I want to start over and stop mea-

asuring my life. Like Fr. Giussani, I don't want my life to be useless.”

**GETTING LOST.** We have everything in that first encounter, Fr. Giussani reminds us, but we understand what that “everything” is through our circumstances. I've known some of these young people for five years now; I've accompanied them from high school into the university. It's beautiful to see them passing “from the evidence of the first encounter to conviction.” This is a step that Zacchaeus had to face the next day when, after getting angry with his wife, he found himself pained by it when he thought of Jesus. »»

» One of the students told us how upset he was when two friends of the community distanced themselves after having followed for awhile. “Do you also want to leave?” comes to mind. “It’s the time of the person,” Fr. Giussani told us. We have all the tools we need to judge; we shouldn’t be afraid. The student started to tell us about how he decided to take a “break” from School of Community and the choir... but it didn’t last long. “I saw how I got lost in my ideology,” he explained. “I couldn’t manage without the gaze of ‘Auntie’ Rose, Alberto, and Seve.” The heart at work. Which is the starting place for a true verification within university life.

**IN CLASS.** During a lecture, an economics professor explained the pyramid of human needs. The base of the pyramid was our basic needs. Once they are satisfied, you find the need for security and then you go on up to the top of the pyramid, where one’s needs are completely fulfilled. One young man raised his hand. “Professor, in our experience, it’s not true that our needs are completely satisfied.” The class broke out into a lively discussion. The student felt compelled to tell the class about his experience. All of it. Afterwards, the professor, who had become curious, asked him, “But wait, what is the source of your worldview?” The student told him about Giussani and gave him his copy of *Why the Church?*

This 50-year-old European priest was convinced, once again, that to prepare for the Exercises it’s better to let oneself be struck by what happens, rather than arriving with ready-made reflections. The Unnamed, standing stubbornly at the door of Cardinal Federigo, is more effective than the “I already know everything” of our Kantian mentality... **T**

## “LOOK THERE, WHERE EVERYTHING IS MORE BEAUTIFUL”

The passing of Francesco Frigerio, and the witness given by the Ugandan community, attesting to an “impossible correspondence.”

by Samuele Otim Rizzo and Matteo Severgnini

**“W**hen I teach them to swim during practice, I am also caught between these two feelings. If I hold them up all the time and too much, they will never learn to swim. But then, if I do not hold them up at just the right moment, they might swallow water. Such is the mystery of man’s freedom, says God... this is how Péguy explained the responsibility of being a parent, but Francesco always cast away all doubts, he always maintained his freedom, using it for the best.” These were the words of Gianni Frigerio at the funeral of his son, in the midst of the silence and tears of more than a thousand people who filled the Basilica of Treviglio (near Bergamo), Francesco’s hometown, on January 19.

Shortly before he graduated with a degree in civil engineering, his desire to communicate to the world that which had shaped his life—Jesus and his encounter with the Movement—carried him to Kenya, where, while working for AVSI, he built the Little Prince Primary School, in the slum of Kibera. There in Kenya he met Sara, who would become his wife: together they moved to Kitgum, where they worked for AVSI until Francesco opened a construction company. They moved to Gulu, and then to Kampala. During all this, Luigi, Lucia, and Giuseppe were born.

During those same years, Francesco also built the Shrine of the Martyrs Jildo and Daudi in Paymol (on a hill in Wi-Polo, in northern Uganda) and the Luigi Giussani High School, a crowning jewel of Kampala. He always worked with a desire for beauty and attention to detail: “As a builder, building a sanctuary is as good as it gets,”

he said, “but the task of installing a bathroom takes on the same value. I don’t take it for granted. I had begun to pressure myself, basing my self-image on what I could do. Through the companionship of the Movement, I rediscovered that my true value lies in being Francesco as God intended me to be.”

**On January 10<sup>th</sup>,** Francesco and one of his coworkers were killed in a car accident on the highway between Kampala and Gulu. “In those first few hours I found myself in a state of shock, feeling anger and uncertainty,” our friend Andrea remembered. “No thought could calm me down. I asked myself, more honestly than I ever had

before: what does being a Christian add to life? Truly: what does it change?” There was also the reaction of a student in the CLU: “When I heard the news, I couldn’t believe it. A series of questions emerged: What is the meaning of life? What makes it worth living? Through what relationship is one able to face death?”

It was impossible for any of us to dismiss those questions, but the more we reflected on them, the more we realized that a miracle was happening in our midst. Through this moment of pain, we became more united, and the final task of our lives became clearer. Christ was visible in the faces of friends, as Manolita put it: “As we lived this, Christ, little by little, became incarnate in Sara and in all of us. Precisely in this companionship of friends, He became present.” The death of Francesco turned into an experience of unexpected certainty for everyone. A new sense of unity was born among us,

**“I asked myself: what does being a Christian add to life? Truly: what does it change?”**



The friends of Francesco at the Kampala airport when the family was taking his body back to Italy. Below, the image chosen by his wife for the memorial card.

which started from Sara's desire that we stay together, each time ending up talking and singing. Andrea added: "The more I looked at Sara, the more the flame of an impossible—more impossible than ever!—correspondence burned in my heart."

**The same thing happened** to many of us. Our pettiness was overpowered by Sara's certainty. We could not help looking at her to see where her gaze was fixed; her every action was an affirmation of the Resurrection. What she had was not a life jacket to rescue her from desperation, but rather the certainty of a presence, which illuminated her face whenever she talked about her husband.

Two days after the accident, the Apostolic Nuncio, Michael August Blume, celebrated the funeral Mass in Kampala. The church was packed. The casket was brought in to the song "Quando uno ha il cuore buono" ("When Someone Has a Good Heart"), a song chosen by Francesco's wife that we were used to singing at least three times a day. Attention was given to every detail. Sara requested the first reading from the day of the accident: "Samuel, Samuel [...] Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." The calling of Samuel found an echo in the call of Francesco and the call of everyone. Then, there was the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans: "If God is for us, who is against us? Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution or peril, or sword?" The Gospel was the same as the one read on their wedding day: the wedding at Cana. Sara selected it because it was about a wedding: the promise of a banquet with God, forever.

At the end of the Mass, Fr. Carrón's message to Sara and her children was read: "I want to be especially close to you in this time of pain, in which your



Dad has arrived at the destination that all of us wish to reach. With the certainty of Christ in your eyes, you can look at this separation full of the hope that we all need right now." Afterwards, Sara expressed her gratitude and explained the phrase and the picture on the funeral card. "When someone has a good heart, he is not afraid of anything anymore, everything fills him with gladness, his only desire is to love": this described the heart of Francesco perfectly. He lived this truth and he had an infinite love for his vocation, his family, his friends, and the people he worked with. He always used to say that no one should ever go to bed angry; instead, one can rest only when his heart is at peace with everyone." In the picture on the card, he is looking straight into the camera. His wife had captured that moment in time: "We were on our honeymoon, at Iguazú Falls, heaven on Earth, heaven itself; Francesco beheld it and then turned around to look at me, as if to say: 'This heaven before my eyes is the destiny of all of us. Don't look at me, look there where everything is clearer and more beautiful: I am waiting for you.'"

The Mass had an unexpected missionary effect. People were amazed, even speechless. A friend from Eritrea asked if in Italian culture it was not the custom to cry in the face of death. An Italian friend who is an atheist kept asking: "Are you sure that that is his wife? How is it possible that she has that outlook?" Yet another friend said, "I would be hopeless. Seeing you

makes me think that perhaps this is all true. You make me want to come back to the Church."

The next day, there was a Mass in the Luigi Giussani High School, a place Francesco felt was "his," and on Monday, another with the Archbishop of Gulu, John Baptist Odama, in the slum of Kireka, the site of Meeting Point International, another place that Francesco loved. At the end of that Mass, Francesco's father, Gianni, stood up and offered his thanks: "Today, you are the face of Christ for me." With our hearts overflowing, we sang until the late afternoon. The only words that could describe that evening were "an impossible correspondence"!

**Toward the end of January**, we had the Summer Vacation of the community in Uganda; it was our first vacation, something that Francesco had wanted for many years. There, Rose said: "What is salvation? Salvation is that every reality is Christ calling us. It is not the beautiful people or the beautiful moments that attract me; it is always Christ, and this makes every moment intense and eternal."

Sara has attested to this experience of eternity, as she did on Valentine's Day: "I asked Franci to give me a sign: I wished for him to give me, even if only for a few seconds, a glimmer of what he is experiencing, so that I may enjoy a taste of his happiness." It was an ordinary day, and she went out to eat a modest meal with some friends. The next morning, though, she woke up a little embittered, for it seemed that her husband had not granted her wish. Then, the gift came... she intuited something. The restaurant where she had gone was called Paradiso (Heaven): "Franci is in heaven and heaven is communion with the saints and our loved ones; heaven for me on this Earth is to live this communion with the people Christ has given me to journey with."

How grateful one must feel to live following the signs of the Mystery. Everything speaks of Him, and because of this nothing is futile, everything has meaning, and death does not have the last word, because Christ has already conquered it. This is the great promise that has been made visible to everyone.

# TRACES AND MY HAPPINESS

**One interview, three voices: AISHA, HANIFA, and SARA. They are the three Muslim women involved in Meeting Point who sell *Traces* magazine. “It makes me love Catholicism.” This is why.**

BY ANDREA NEMBRINI AND ROSE BUSINGYE

**M**eeting Point International (MPI) in Kampala has always been, from its very origin, international. The women always say that “the heart is international,” and for this reason they have always welcomed anyone who wants to come as a friend, regardless of tribe, religion, or language. This is the first miracle of this place, bearing in mind the strict sense of tribal belonging that still dictates relationships in Africa to this day. When they gather, all of the women wear the yellow shirt of MPI, and when they shout, “One heart!” it is impossible to tell them apart.

For about a year now, new colors have mixed in with the yellow: they are the veils worn by Sara, Aisha, and Hanifa. Sara is a nurse who works with Rose, and she invited her two neighbors, who are also Muslim, to MPI. Their enthusiasm as a result of this encounter has made them a significant presence at MPI, and—as we have recently discovered—they are among the most energetic protagonists in selling *Traces* magazine, to which they dedicate themselves each month. We wanted to ask them about the origin of their passion.

**Why do you sell *Traces*? Why do you like doing it?**

**Sara.** I’m a true Muslim from birth. I joined Meeting Point International in 2011. I didn’t know what *Traces* was, but I started buying it, reading it, and loving it. There are a lot of beautiful things in this magazine that you can learn from. In particular, there are other people’s experiences, and when you read an experience that is different from yours, you discover more about yourself, about what you really desire for your life. As a consequence, I’m now studying catechism and I’m going to the School of Community, because I want to learn more about what’s in the magazine.

**Hanifa.** I joined MPI even though I’m Muslim. I joined because even though there were always other people around me, I have never been welcomed like I was at MPI. I was so surprised by the way they welcomed me and treated me. I used to be sorrowful and my heart was heavy; but from the day I entered this place my life has changed. I’m now happy, and my family is too. So, about *Traces*: actually I don’t know English very well, and I even can’t read this magazine, but I sell it because of the

friendship I received here, and I love doing it. This friendship pushed me to sell *Traces*, and also to love Catholicism. Sometimes I think I believe in this religion even if I’m walking on the path of Islam. I remain Muslim, but I love Catholicism.

**Aisha.** I joined MPI because I wanted to be happy like these women. One day there was a woman next to me with an issue of *Traces*, but the woman was leaving, and I didn’t know how I could find the magazine again, so I asked her if I could take a look. I looked at the pages of the magazine, and I could read one word: “happiness.” I saw a lot of pictures, and in all of them people were happy. So I asked her how much it cost, and I bought my first *Traces* for three UGX (approximately one USD). I was surprised because everything in it was about happiness, the possibility of being happy even if you are in trouble. When you read about the experiences of happy people, you also become happy. There wasn’t one story in the magazine that wasn’t able to make you happy. Even now it’s like this: every time I buy it—and I always buy it—it makes me happy. *Traces* made me understand that religions are different, but often what separates us is just the way we dress; what’s important is that we are together because God is one. This is what I’ve learned from *Traces*.

**Could you explain your love for this Catholic experience, for *Traces*, despite the fact you are women of Muslim faith? How can these two go together?**

**Sara.** Rose told me about my value, which I didn’t know before. I understood that the Catholic religion does not discriminate; it welcomes all religions. I learned this because Rose taught me that you have to discover yourself. This means that



From left, Aisha, Hanifa, and Sara.

nobody should say to you, “Come here and be a Catholic!” You need to learn this yourself, but only after you have discovered yourself. When you know who you are, you decide what you want to be. And for me, after discovering myself, I decided to stay with these Catholics.

**Hanifa.** When I was suffering so much, no one was touched by my situation, nobody helped me. But here I discovered I was helped... Someone has loved me, someone gave me her friendship. I even don't know how to explain it: one day I was crying all day long, and my children as well; they were going to a very bad school, they even didn't receive their grade reports... Now I'm happy, my home has changed completely, my children go to school, they study in peace, they are happy. So how could I not love this place that has brought to me all this happiness? How could I not love this magazine that tells stories about this place?

**Aisha.** Usually I buy all the leftover copies (because I don't want to waste them) so that I can give them to my friends and family members. At first my father, who is a Muslim, asked me where I got it from, but

now he likes it; I told him to ask me if there is anything in it he doesn't understand. Often *Traces* is so beautiful that I buy more than one copy, because I know that anyone who receives it will surely also be happy.

**When you are selling *Traces*, what do you tell the people you meet?**

**Aisha.** First I read it very well, and I pay attention to the beautiful things in it that make me happy, the things that help me. I sell it because I want other people to be happy like me; people understand if what you are selling is important to you. What I tell the people I meet is simply what I read about in *Traces*; I even show them the pages I like. And people ask us a lot of questions.

**Hanifa.** I can't read *Traces* because I don't know English, but my children read it for me at home. They show me the page where an article I like is, so that when I'm selling I can tell people: “Look, it's right here!”

**Sara.** Before you sell it, you first have to go through it, so that you know why you are outside the church shouting: “*Traces*, *Traces*!” And you have to explain; otherwise it's just a

word, they don't understand. But if you tell them about your own experience, they respond with: “Ok, I trust you, I'll buy it.”

**What has been your most beautiful experience while selling *Traces*?**

**Aisha.** The most beautiful thing for me is that when we are selling it a lot of people come to us to ask why Muslims are selling a Catholic magazine. We answer them: “Because we love it; because we are receiving beautiful things from it, and because we want you to have them, too.”

**Sara.** One day when I was selling *Traces*, an educated old Catholic man came to me asking a lot of questions to embarrass me. He said: “You people, what are you doing? Is this thing from Uganda? Where is it from? Is the Pope aware of it?” I was able to answer all his questions very well—I told him about Communion and Liberation, about Italy, and I told him that even the priest had given an announcement during Mass about our selling *Traces*. In the end he said: “You Muslim woman, you have challenged me,” and he began looking for money in his pocket to buy one. When I'm selling it, I feel like I'm selling gold, a very expensive thing!

**Hanifa.** Sometimes other people who are selling other magazines in the same place tell us that our magazine is very expensive because it is a *muzungu* thing [a thing for white people], but they also ask, “How are you able to stay with these white people, hugging them like friends? I wish I could also be embraced in this way.” We answer them: “Yes, this magazine is expensive because it comes from far away, but we are also ‘expensive’ and valuable because of the friendship we are living.” **T**



RECUPERAR O INÍCIO

# “YOU CANNOT FAKE THE HUNDREDFOLD”

**The “veteran” who was surprised again after many years. The 70-year-old woman who had recently met CL. Violence in Mexico and starvation in Venezuela. A report on the annual summit of Latin American CL leaders with Julián Carrón.**

BY DAVIDE PERILLO

“Instead, for John and Andrew...” The revolution starts here, in the middle of the assembly. It was Alejandro, an Argentine from Santa Fe, who was speaking to Fr. Julián Carrón and 300 others present in the room. He is one of the first members of CL in Latin America—he was among those who met Fr. Francesco Ricci. He retraced a journey over many years in



which the Gospel, church traditions and even “what had struck me most about Giussani, the invitation to live reality with intensity,” had become, almost without his realizing it, all talk. They were words—true words—but repeated without making an impact on his life, on his relationship with his wife, his kids, or his work as an attorney. In short: an “ideology.” Instead, he said that a true experience of the Movement “reawakens human sensibility; it makes life fuller. It is a shift in mentality; it changes the way you look at things. It is a revolution.” Carrón interjected: “How did you learn this? What change took place inside you that made you discover this?” Here, Alejandro mentioned “the first two who met Jesus,” those described by Fr. Giussani: “Instead, for John and Andrew, it was in following that exceptional person that they learned to know differently and to change themselves and reality. That is what happened to me. Being in the Movement, by a kind of osmosis, I realized that this was true.” That by following, one can see more and that relationships are born—or reborn. “You become more attuned to everything around you. It is a revolution.”

This has always been God’s method. It was reaffirmed several times and in many examples raised during the three days of the Assembly of

the Leaders of CL in Latin America (ARAL) at Centro Santa Fé in São Paulo, Brazil. They came from 22 countries to work on the theme “Restoring or Beginning.”

**A SIMPLE CRITERION.** Carrón explained the theme during the introduction on Friday night. He reintroduced the Beginning Day and the provocation offered by Fr. Giussani: in the beginning the Movement “was built on Christ, and you may say it was naive, but the heart of the matter, the persuasive motivator was the fact of Christ.” Then the tension shifted, by and by, toward “cultural translation.” The consequence was dramatic: we

do not know Him anymore. Carrón said, “For months, we have walked on a path. Now we can ask ourselves: Do we know Christ a little better? How can we prove it? Otherwise, our path is useless. We have things to do, we have projects, but the essential is missing.” And to help verify this, he offered a simple criterion: “The way we face what life brings. Those who do not have this familiarity start from their impression of reality, not from an event. If Christ has entered into the heart of life, it can be seen when life challenges us, not when we just talk about it.”

The challenges are many on this continent that is as beautiful and as tormented as the sea sung about in the song heard often during the ARAL, *Debaixo d’agua*: “Underwater”—where “everything is more beautiful, blue and colorful [...] But I need to breathe every day.” There is a need to live within the struggles every day brings: the hunger that besieges Venezuela, the violence that afflicts Mexico... and the sense of dissatisfaction that touches everyone. This is the same challenge offered by the Pope in two trips in the span of a few months through Colombia, Chile, and Peru. That evening, the vis- ➤



On these pages, moments from the annual Assembly of CL Leaders of Latin America, held on March 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> in São Paulo, Brazil.

» its that had moved everyone became the starting point. “But we risk losing their overarching meaning, if we do not reconsider the challenge,” commented Fr. Julián de la Morena, the leader of CL in Latin America. He described a dialogue between Fr. Giussani and John Paul II in which the latter said: “The problem is truth,” and Fr. Giussani replied: “Your Holiness, if I may say so, the problem is Peter,” because if it is not bound to its historical origins, the truth disintegrates. And Peter in the person of Pope Francis has come to the countries that Catalina, Luis, and Silvia are from. The three took the stage to tell their stories.

The first, Catalina, is Colombian. She was a teacher, but she lost her job just before the Pope came: “I asked myself how this could be an opportunity. In the presence of Francis, I came as a beggar.” She was surrounded by millions of people. “Why were they there? We often ask ourselves what it means to be a presence. Well, he was the incarnation of it. They sought after him as Zaccheus sought Jesus. It was striking to see the way that he looked at people.” At a certain point during the Pope’s visit, she found herself standing next to the woman who had fired her: “We were there, united, as two women, facing a presence that captivated both of us.”

Luis, who is Chilean, said that Francis “generated a very open space for dialogue, within the Church and between the Church and others” because “we all need an embrace.” Silvia, an oncologist living in Lima, Peru, was moved by those who asked that they be healed and seen. “Those people wanted to touch the hem of his garment in order to feel



loved. You would see them come and ask yourself: What are they looking for? What do they need?” She recounted the amazing conversations she had with her colleagues. Then she asked another question, a big one: “What does it mean to follow the Pope? Because you can only build upon something that is happening.”

**“Everything depends on the memory granted to us at the moment we were touched by His gaze.”**

**TO BREATHE.** Alberto Savorana, who had traveled there from Italy, was tasked with making a synthesis of the path forged by the Pontiff. He began with the words recent-

ly expressed by Cleuza Zerbini, the Leader of the Association Sem Terra: “For me, following the Pope is not a problem: I follow Carrón, he follows the Pope; therefore, I follow the Pope...” Simple. Savorana drew one main point from the previous discussions: the context, “a changing society” that sometimes leaves

us defenseless “just as the disciples were after the crucifixion.” In response to this discomfort, the Pope cited Jesus and his question to Peter, “Do you love me?” which allowed Peter to experience all of the mercy and joy of being a son, “We are not called to replace Christ through our actions. Everything depends on the memory granted to us at the moment we were touched by His gaze.” Our task: to be witnesses. “Jesus calls us through others,” through a companionship, as the Pope said in Puerto Maldonado: “So that we can gather [...] around the person of Jesus.”

The next morning, at the assembly, Carolina from Argentina opened by referring to *Debaixo d’agua* and her “need to breathe, always.” She described how, to her surprise, she was moved by a poor family that made her think about how Christ was moved and about her need to “recognize the measure the Mystery uses,” because this, as the prayer to Fr. Giussani expresses, “makes fruitful the soil in our heart.” Then there was

all that we are. It is the only one. The communication of Christ is handed down through the change that happens inside you, with all of your limits.”

**THE REVOLUTION.** Next was Giovanna, from Brazil. “When I read Giussani’s writings, I underline many lines and make notes about my adventures, attractions, and self-discovery... but the adventure for me is the revolution of reason: a new way to live, to work. It a victory for my I.” She used an unusual but effective image: “It is as if I were a skeleton and every day that I spend here, a piece of flesh is added on, and then I am able to make a movement that once was not possible for me.” She spoke about a conversation she had with a female coworker who had a partner and who had undergone artificial insemination: “One day she came to me in tears asking: ‘Giovanna, can you help me understand what it means to be a mother? How do your friends live?’ She asked me, a *Memor Domini*...” “And how did this help you know Christ more?” asked

Carrón: “What did you realize?” She replied, “For me, it feels like I am born again every day. My reason is widened. I see that if things were as I imagine them in my mind, I wouldn’t be happy at all: my measure is too small.”

“That’s it, the measure!” Carrón pointed out: “We think that suffocation is born from the limitedness of things, not from the fact that our desire is infinite. Imagine being able make your house bigger and that you could put into it all the things that you desire. After awhile, you would want to leave it. The reason for this is our need for totality. It would be better if we >>

**“We think that suffocation is born from the limitedness of things, not from the fact that our desire is infinite.”**

Daniela from Peru, who described being surprised by herself as she waited for the Pope (“I asked myself why I was waiting for him that way, but then I understood: it is because of his relationship with Christ; that is what interests me.”) A moment later, she felt she had been “dishonest” toward parents who came for meetings at her school: “I feel as if I leave something out, as if I cannot bring myself to say His name.” “But would anything you say be enough?” asked Carrón: “How can you introduce these people to reality? If we think we can quell the existential insecurity of the other by saying the right words, we are not following the way that God works. What has the Mystery done to answer this question?”

The answer came one step at a time. It was filled with surprises, like the one described by Max after an unexpected conversation with his boss. (“I requested vacation time, and he asked me where I was going: in a shift in the conversation I had not imagined, I found myself talking about my life here. When someone looks at things

as they are, God reveals Himself.”) Or the surprise of Carlos from Venezuela, who was taken aback by his reaction to the need of a friend who lost the only pair of shoes he owned: “It is not a given that I could look at this friend with a different gaze, but it is thanks to the one who looked at me in a different way.”

The first turning point came through Alexandre, from Ecuador. “There are many things that scandalize me: the defects of the community, of the leaders... But life turns into a disaster when I look at it that way. It is an illusion to think that the little I know about Christ means I can walk on my own: after taking the first steps, I get lost. I need a place that welcomes me and all of my humanity, and this place exists.” This is the characteristic typical of the Christian community, Carrón emphasized: “This place welcomes



» realized this, because when we see that everything is limited, we stop getting angry at things and at others. It's not their fault if they can't fulfill us. But if one understands that the true adventure is that of reason, one can breathe in all situations, even when they are limited. The question is whether or not I live with the awareness of the Infinite present in the limited. What a grace it is to have found a place that introduces me to this totality. How fortunate we are that Christ exists and that He introduced into our lives a new gaze on everything. This is why your coworker asked you how to live..."

Milena, from Salvador de Bahia, suggested that going back to the beginning means "paying attention to where the presence happens again: this is how we learn to love reality, and this presence can be good for everyone." "This is our contribution: that people can see that there is such a thing as a life that is full," emphasized Carrón. This can only happen "by living immersed in this story that took hold of us." It is the same story that took hold of Mariela from Honduras, who was recently baptized and who admitted that from time to time her faith wavers. "You know, the gesture that Christ made through Baptism lasts forever," replied the leader of CL. "Through it, He has told you: you are mine, whatever happens to you. We have certainty not because we are faithful, but because of what He does with us."

**VISIBLE TO EVERYONE.** The lunch break was overflowing with conversations and brightened by the joy of the volunteers in the teal T-shirts, a marvel within a marvel. Then the next seg-



**“We have certainty not because we are faithful, but because of what He does with us.”**

ment began. Alejandro had recently discovered the “instead, for John and Andrew...” “It took me 23 years to get it,” he joked, but only a little. “It does not matter how long it took, what matters is that it was the loyalty to your experience that brought you there, that revealed it to you,” answered Carrón, who continued: “It is enough that one walks this path for it to become visible to everyone. What it will take for all of us to do that, we’ll see, but nothing can overshadow what we have felt.” And further: “We have been given the words of Fr. Giussani, but we cannot just parrot the words, for that would become an ideology. You must live reality. You must belong to a place that continually restores in you a new awareness of reality, a new attitude. This is what the contemporaneity of

Christ does: it generates a new creature. And we realize that we are following because this happens to us. Do we want to find out if we are following Christ? We will find out if we are living the hundredfold. This is the test.” Just moments later, de la Morena called this “the victory of Christ: that during my travels across many countries over these months, I am seeing it in the most surprising and unexpected ways: in people who live peacefully, who breathe even when they are underwater.”

Cristina, a 70-year-old Uruguayan woman, spoke about her recent encounter with the Movement and how something she heard Paula, a young woman from Brazil, say during a conversation with Carrón prior to the beginning of the ARAL, had struck a chord in her. She described “the treasure that I discovered that changed the way I see everything.” And so, after years of hard work and left-leaning mayoral campaign battles, she found herself in the



ple and moments with people that are astonishing, that make you understand that the one who makes everything is Another.” Olavo, from São Paulo, talked about his five children, about losing his job, and about a reality that “seems contradictory, but the more I embrace the circumstances, the more I become a protagonist.” Marco Montrasi, whom everyone calls Bracco, the leader of CL in Brazil, offered these closing remarks: “Sometimes we live in situations that are like graves. But we can see if the words of the Easter poster are true: if after the Resurrection of Christ, everything can be transformed.”

**WITH A GREATER INTENSITY.** The synthesis wove together many things that had been shared as proof that the challenge had been accepted; that in several instances “we started from an event and not from our impressions.” Carrón reiterated Giussani’s ever-present concern, which he had repeated many times over the years, for the “I,” the person. “We have seen the method; it is the event of Christ happening now; it is happening now in particular places and stories. Only by following this can we be regenerated.” Otherwise, one is at the mercy of one’s own analyses. “The true test of whether we are following Christ is the hundredfold. We

cannot fake this.” If someone lives with greater intensity, intelligence, and fullness, that person can see it, and others will see it too. Our task, the reason why we are on this Earth and why we can give back to this world, coincides with that fullness that is inherited by following. “Instead, for John and Andrew...” **T**

present faced by a question: “How do I communicate what I live to my sisters? Why do I want them to also have this...?” Carrón then asked her: “And what did Christ do with you, Cristina? How did He become present? We have to follow His method.”

This is a method, a path, that was enriched by the simple and powerful witnesses on Saturday night. Guillermo talked about the hardships of daily life in Venezuela, where everything has been taken away, except violence, and how many are fleeing. A husband and father of two small children, he lost his job and was crushed by his responsibility and by not being able to put food on the table. Then he opened up and asked for help. This showed him that “not all forms of help are the same: some destroy you, because they try to replace you, while others make you grow because they respect your freedom.” He spoke about his son Samuel: “There was no sugar in the house. He told me: it’s OK

dad, it will come when our friends bring the groceries.” He meant the *bolsa solidaria* (Groceries for Compassion) program organized by the community. “At the age of 7, he realized that his dad couldn’t solve this problem, but that our friends could. In that moment, I thanked God, because everything that we are going through is worth it if it will educate my son to think this way: not to think that one can do everything alone, but that one is dependent on others for everything.” Now Guillermo is self-employed and the situation has improved. “But I place my hope only in Christ, because he is the source of the good for all. Even of those things that we do not understand.”

Giampiero told a story about Cuba, where he saw people growing: “Peo-

**“Our task, the reason why we are on this Earth, coincides with that fullness that is inherited by following.”**

# LOOKING OUT ON “CAMPO G”

Twenty years after the death of **WILLIAM CONGDON**, three brothers at the Benedictine monastery known as the Cascinazza speak about life with the great American painter, and how he helped the monks live their vocation. Even those who never met him.

BY LUCA FIORE

**W**illiam Congdon called the field outside the window of his studio at the Cascinazza, the Benedictine monastery, “Campo [Field] G.” This name referred to the first letter of the name of Giorgio Marognoli, one of the monks in the community that hosted the great American painter from 1979 until his death 20 years ago on April 15, 1998.

His choice of name for that little plot of land, one of the favorite subjects of his work from the beginning of the 1980s on, gives one a sense of the impact this community of monks had on both his artistic sense and his humanity.

Today, overcoming their typically reserved nature, Giorgio and two of his brothers, Claudio Del Ponte and Fr. Giuseppe La Rocca, have broken their long silence and accepted our invitation to speak about their “companion on the road.”

**NEW YORK AND ASSISI.** “He asked me to come to his studio pretty regularly. I looked at his paintings and offered a few thoughts,” Giorgio said. “The first *Campo G* originated at a time when he was unable to paint; he was stuck. It was shortly after he moved here. I said something to him that got the artistic juices flowing again. He said to me, ‘Thank you, because you’ve given me the blood

for my paintings.’”

The two had met in 1968 in the office of the newly-founded Jaca Book publishing house on Via Bagutta in Milan. Congdon had an active role in its establishment. “I met him there for the first time, but we really got to know each other later in Subiaco, where I had entered the monastery of St. Scholastica at the age of 21.” The American painter, a successful member of the “New York School” (as successful as another member, Jackson Pollock), had converted to Catholicism in 1959 in Assisi, and had been given use of the Beato Lorenzo hermitage above the Benedictine Abbey of Subiaco for a number of years. “I went to see him

there. During times of recreation, I walked up there. He showed me his paintings, but at the time I wasn't on the same 'wavelength' of his work."

**THE OLD MAN.** Congdon, who was born in 1921 in Providence, Rhode Island, was 56 at the time. He had met Fr. Giussani some time before, thanks to Paolo Mangini, his baptismal sponsor, who was 20 years his junior. Mangini was a member of the first *Memores Domini* house, in Gudo Gambaredo. On June 29, 1971, the Cascinazza was founded just a few hundred meters away from the house, and Congdon wrote: "I entrust my art to this monastery which, in turn, offers itself for this art; that is, it lays down its life of communion as the source of this art." He did not know at the time that, a few years later, he would establish his studio and home inside the Cascinazza.

"Art had become the expression of his being a *Memor Domini*. This was what made him so great," Giorgio says. "For him, painting was obedience to a gift. When he realized that a painting he had finished didn't

flow from his experience, he threw it out. He would say, 'It came from the old man.'" Congdon's diary is full of notes from conversations the two had: "November 10, 1979. Giorgio: 'How do you remember the colors you've seen to paint them?' Me: 'The gift reminds me, and I remember the colors.' Giorgio: 'Exactly—art is a gift.' Me: 'Every gesture, when done in the Spirit, is a gift, is art.'"

Giorgio went on to say, "He considered this place an extension of the house in Gudo. And we welcomed him aware of this fact. We helped each other live our respective vocations. Every so often, he'd say to me, 'I don't see *you*, I see you as part of a body, the Cascinazza.'"

While Giorgio was talking about how he was a sounding board for Congdon on spiritual and artistic matters, Fr. Claudio decided to set the record straight: "As my confreres know, I was a little delayed in grasping the depth of his perceptivity and his artwork. Still, I was struck by the intensity of his gaze and his dramatic life. And, at the same time, by his childlike heart." He told two stories: "One time he came to lunch, tast-

ed the risotto and exclaimed, 'Who made this?!' [*Here, Fr. Claudio imitated an American accent*]. It was an ordinary risotto, but for him it was the best he had ever tasted. He knew how to live in wonder and be grateful. The other example of this was his careful preparation, especially in his last days, for when I came to bring him Holy Communion. He placed two lit candles on the table. It was his encounter with Jesus, who came to visit him at home."

**"MORE OF A MONK THAN I AM."** Over the last 20 years, memories of the painter have often come back to Fr. Claudio. "I would almost say that Bill was more of a monk than I am, and God gave him to us as a priceless companion, especially because he was older than all of us; we were a pretty young community. He frequently came to Mass and prayed the Hours with us. He was a reminder of the profound nature of our vocation. I often found myself wanting to live with the same intensity he did. For him, nothing was trivial. He had a sense of humor; he was quite witty. For him, everything was a sign of the Mystery."

When asked if he ever confessed his struggle to understand the art to the painter, Fr. Claudio answered with a smile. "St. Benedict says that each person has his gift, but with time I started to enter a little bit into his point of view." Giorgio chimed in, "If he asked you what you thought about a painting and you didn't answer, he'd say, 'Your silence is very eloquent.' If you told him it was 'pretty,' he would say, 'You're not looking at it right.' If you told him you weren't feeling the painting, maybe because of a color or an >>>

**Congdon (April 15, 1912–April 15, 1998) with the monks in 1994. Giorgio Marognoli is crouching in front, in the middle.**





» aspect of its composition you didn't like, he would thank you. And maybe redo the whole thing."

The monks were traveling companions for Congdon's vocation and a help for his artistic work. Like the time when Congdon asked another monk, Bruno, to help him render the "woven" look of tilled fields. Within a few days, the brother found him a "comb" created from an old metal file. It was the inspiration for one of Congdon's most beautiful series of landscapes.

Brother Giuseppe met Congdon before he came to the Cascinazza. While he was an architecture student in Milan (though he is from Messina), he invited the painter to speak at his university, as he had

**Campo G, 12 (brina [frost]) (January 29, 1981), oil on wood panel.**

previously invited Giovanni Testori. When they first met in 1982, Congdon welcomed the college student with a typed letter. The first line said, "What could I possibly have to say to a young architect?" The last line read, "An artist prays by loving things, because he loves them with suffering." It was the beginning of a friendship that would accompany Giuseppe along his entire path to becoming a monk. He still has the cards the artist wrote on the occasions of his entrance into the monastery, his investiture, and his solemn profession. "He took a liking to my dad because he said he reminded him of Igor Stravinsky, whom he

met when he was living in Venice," Giuseppe said. "When I first arrived, I had the job of cleaning the monastery, and when he heard me on the stairs to his studio, he would come out to say hello and to thank me."

**ATTAINING SIMPLICITY.** From his binder of "keepsakes," Giuseppe pulled out a clipping of the obituary Fr. Giussani wrote on the painter's death. "In my mind, it's the most beautiful 'portrait' ever done of Congdon." It says, "The long years of his life ingrained in him an awareness that every work of art that flowed from the depths of his creativity was a witness to himself and to the world of

Christ's presence. We are grateful to him for his friendship through which, in the simplicity he attained, he continually reminded us that beauty—tied to the memory of Christ's death and Resurrection—is an expression of and introduction to the Truth of reality." Giuseppe commented, "I saw how he attained that simplicity with my own eyes. He occasionally demonstrated the self-love and egocentrism common in artists, but each time he asked for forgiveness and started over. That 'attained simplicity' refers most of all, though, to his profound way of seeing everything. One time, I saw him so amazed at the light of a sunset that he went down into the courtyard in his underwear." Giorgio added, "Right, I have the card he

gave me the same day, asking me if I had noticed it. He wrote, 'I don't think I've ever seen, from India to Africa, such a spectacle, such a heavenly vision as this evening's sunset.' It was beauty, the *gift* of beauty that won him over."

Giuseppe tried to go a step further in his tribute. "What has stuck with me the most from him is a lesson about the unity between our vocation in this place and the historical task each of us has." He pulled out another photocopy: the text of a talk Congdon gave at Abbiategrosso in 1982. "The death of my old



**PROFILE**

An artist who enjoyed great success in New York in the 1950s, Bill Congdon converted to Catholicism in 1959. From 1979 until his death, he lived at the Cascinazza Monastery, just outside Milan.

life came about in Assisi in 1959, and from there God led me, agonizingly, step by step, to be planted in the desert-like plains of Bassa, outside Milan. It was only through my desperate 'yes' that God could stick me in the middle of hell." Giuseppe said, "Bill was the person who, along with Fr. Giussani, most helped me to see this place as the one God chose for a task saturated with history. Now, when I think back on him, I'm filled with a sense of contrition that makes me ask myself, 'Am I living with the same seriousness he had?'"



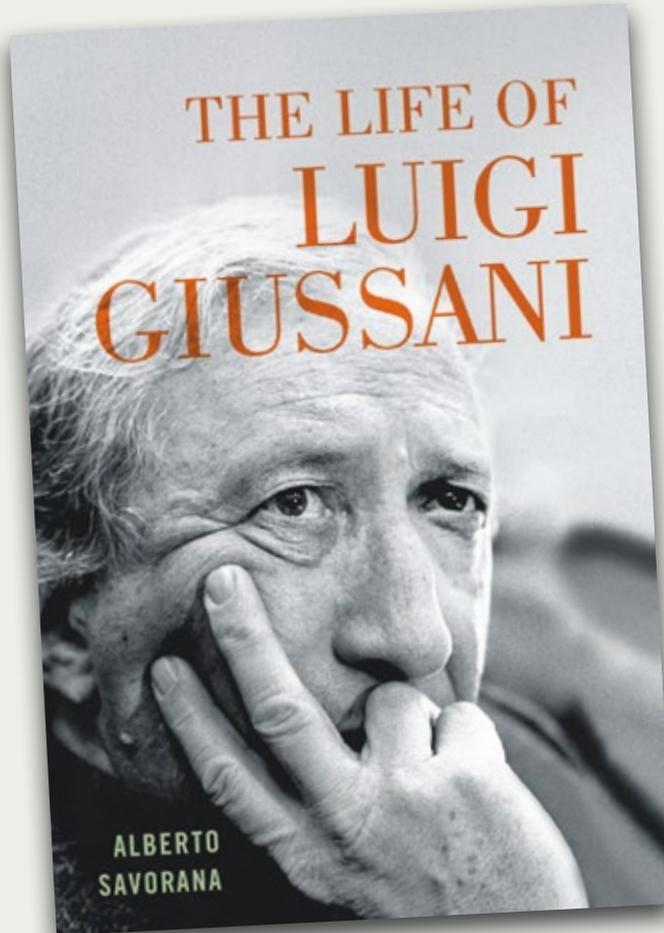
*Primavera [Spring], 3* (March 18, 1981), oil on wood panel.

**REMAINING SMALL.** The three monks admit that, even now, it's hard to look out the windows of the monastery without thinking of Congdon's paintings. "I'm struck by the fact that the field looks different from the first floor than it does from the second floor, and this perspective is exactly what you see in his paintings," Giuseppe explained. "Still today, I'm amazed." "It's like the field is coming right up to you," echoed Giorgio, lifting his open palm toward his face.

Fr. Claudio related how the prior, Fr. Sergio, told Francesco, one of the latest arrivals at the monastery, about how important Congdon was for him. He remembered something the painter said over 30 years ago: "Look at what's looking back at you! That rock... It's Mount Tabor." The rock that was the place of Christ's Transfiguration. Francesco writes, "Though I only started to get to know him when I entered the monastery (18 years after his death), he is a witness to me that the method for reaching true knowledge is in remaining 'small.'" **T**

# THE LIFE OF LUIGI GIUSSANI

by Alberto Savorana. Translated by Chris Bacich and Mariangela Sullivan



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

1,416 Pages, December 2017

Monsignor Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was the founder of the Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation in Italy, which has hundreds of thousands of adherents around the globe. In *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, Alberto Savorana, who spent an important part of his life working and studying with Giussani, draws on many unpublished documents to recount who the priest was and how he lived. Giussani's life story is particularly significant because it shares many of the same challenges, risks, and paths toward enlightenment that are described in his numerous and influential publications.

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

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