



TRACES

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07

***Starting
anew***

TRACES

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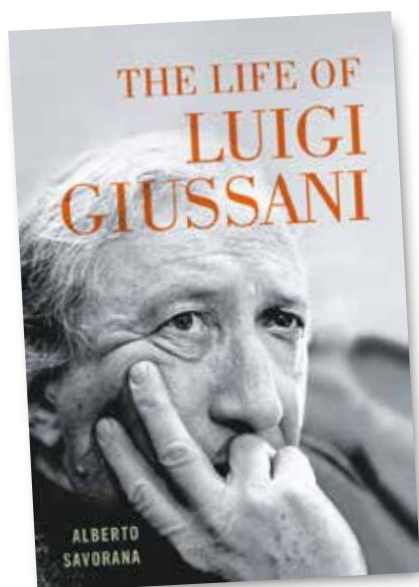
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for the texts by Luigi Ciussani and Julián Carrón

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Full of life



1,416 pages | December 2017

THE LIFE OF LUIGI GIUSSANI

by Alberto Savorana. Translated by Chris Bacich and Mariangela Sullivan

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

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Seeking new roads

It will not be the usual summer—that is for certain. In the age of the pandemic, habits have been uprooted all over the place, one after another. These months, too, will be a strange patchwork of commitments to catch up on and forced pauses, time for fresh air and time on Zoom, vacation (for those who still have it) or work (for those who still have it) under the shadow of circumstances that are still quite challenging. We can easily bet, however, on the fact that the positive spirit we already see will grow even stronger, an impulse that can be summed up by a word with many implications: “Restart.” Each of us interprets it in our own way, and there are even some who rightly point out its limits (if we restart without knowing where to go, or just go back to “before,” what will have been the point of this recent period?), but in the end it is the word that best expresses the urgent need to keep walking.

In the pages of this magazine, we often go back to Fr. Giussani’s intuition that summer is “the time of our freedom,” when regular obligations slow down a bit. What we choose to do and how we do it reveals what is truly important to us. This year, the boundaries are much narrower: there is no guarantee at all that we can simply follow our own plans. Paradoxically, however, this calls our freedom into play even more.

When restarting in the present context, nothing is automatic or a sheer act of will. It is not enough to sit waiting for someone else to deliver aid and regulations (though these are necessary), even if that is their responsibility. And it is also not enough to redouble our efforts, fooling ourselves that we can do everything by ourselves. Rather, the restart will be an opportunity to recognize whether our humanity has truly been reawakened over the last few months, to see whether our freedom fully accepts the challenge of responding to the call of a reality that has never been so *pro-vocative* (*vocare* means “to call”), to see how we get moving, seeking new roads, weaving new and unprecedented relationships, and asking ourselves questions we usually take for granted.

The Rimini Meeting, one of the world’s largest cultural events, held every summer in Rimini, Italy, is seeking to do this in its own way. We went to its organizers to learn how the Meeting will restart. The magazine also contains other stories of restarting in our Close-up and letters, and a witness from Sr. Laura Girotto, a missionary in Ethiopia. Above all, we offer to our readers the chance to follow a path outlined in a soon-to-be-published text by Fr. Julián Carrón, the leader of CL, now available in part at clonline.org. In *The Brilliance in Your Eyes: What Saves Us from Nothingness?* he takes a deeper look at the drama of the world today and at the gift Christianity brings into the world even in this unprecedented time. The eyes in which he sees “brilliance” are those of men and women who are fully alive and free.

Dario, Marco, Gladys

edited by
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My dad's illness and a change of gaze

“When you’re really shipwrecked, you do really find what you want,” says Chesterton, as quoted in the introduction to Julián Carrón’s *What saves us from nothingness?* In mid-February, my dad complained that he couldn’t see well. The eye doctor immediately sent him to the hospital. The diagnosis took our breath away: a brain tumor. My dad was 62 years old and had been retired for a couple of years. The news was such a blow, and among the many emotions came the question, What meaning is there? I wrote to my group of friends from our School of Community, quickly and without expectations. I did that because at least they would pray and I couldn’t. My friends answered they would pray for us and for him. They all said the same thing: “entrust yourself,” but I didn’t understand, I felt arid, nothing had any meaning. I sought out a friend who had lost her dad a few years ago because at his funeral, I did not see desperation in her eyes, but something different. She told me to not censure anything of my humanity. And then the pandemic hit. When Fr. Carrón’s first letter came out, I read it in a flash, changing the subject in my mind: instead of the pandemic, my dad’s illness. In talking with one of my friends, he said I wouldn’t find an answer to what was happening, but I would have companionship. I still didn’t understand. In the following days, they operated on my dad and after some improvement, he took a turn for the worse. Federica, a friend from the School of Community, called and told me to pray and to trust. I responded that I

couldn’t, and she tried again, “Let’s say the Rosary together, starting tomorrow evening at 6:30.” My dad got worse. Federica wrote, “We invite all of our friends of the School of Community to pray.” In this period, everything changed. We couldn’t even go see him because he had contracted the virus. About 10 of us joined in the Rosary from our homes. We started in mid-April and didn’t miss a day until the day of my dad’s funeral on June 3rd. On the second Sunday of May, I went to Sacro Monte and realized how grateful I was to the Lord for all that was happening. My gaze upon my dad’s illness, upon the situation, and upon my life, changed. I have started to breathe again, to be happy and thankful, not by virtue of some reasoning, but, just as Fr. Carrón has said, because of a particular companionship. I have experienced an event that will be a part of my memory for the rest of my life.

Dario, Varese (Italy)

“I know to whom I want to give my life”

I am a recent college graduate and I decided to join the Fraternity. This is a time in which many of the plans and ideas I had about my future have been disrupted by the pandemic. I had hoped to find a job right away, to join the grown-up world, to start setting aside some money so that I would finally be able to propose to my girlfriend. Unfortunately, however, because of Covid, it’s been very difficult to get a job and for the past three months I’ve spent my days navigating the internet looking for a decent offer. Leaving the university was not as simple as I thought it would be: I discovered I have many fewer true friends than I thought, although I do have a few. I started a new School of Community, but it’s not easy to build relationships and live community over Zoom. All this to say, in all this uncertainty about the future and about relationships, I decided

to join. In fact, in the midst of all of these question marks, there's also an enormous exclamation mark: I know to Whom I want to give my life! I'm writing to share the amazement I felt reading the texts proposed to new members of the Fraternity. I sensed that the Movement had a great tenderness toward me. Where else does there exist a place that takes to heart my fulfillment? That uses money as an instrument in an education to poverty? That reminds people to support each other spiritually and materially? That insists on a missionary conception of life?... The beauty and correspondence of all of this to my person makes me want to adhere fully and definitively to this companionship. I think about the paradox that for the world, rules correspond in some way to a form of limitation, but instead, adhering to the indications of the Movement makes me feel glad and free. After reading these texts, I immediately asked my girlfriend and some dear friends (in whom the previous evening I had sensed a sort of aridity and distance), to reread them together so they could be called back again to a tension in life. I have felt such enormous gratitude for this gift that I have not deserved, which is the call to the Christian life within the church and in particular through the charism of our Movement.

Marco, Italy

“What is man’s real problem?”

Looking at what is happening to man in these days, I am very grateful, because the world is discovering things that it would never have discovered in the tranquillity that seemingly existed before the pandemic. Every day comes with fears about a reality that no one can predict, and everything seems to be working together to drive out the last ounce of hope in man. People are trying to find solutions to what is happening, not only with respect to the coronavirus crisis, but even concerning the floods of the recent days in East Africa, the problems in the US, Indonesia, and the UK, political tensions, and war. I'm not saying that it's bad to look for solutions; it's so beautiful and amazing to consider the unity that this pandemic has provoked in the medical and social fields. But in the face of all this, I still wonder, What is man's real problem? What is the real crisis of his life, which forces him to hide from himself, from his own heart, from his true need, and pretend that everything is fine, or finds an excuse for anything

that is not right? For me, this is the real crisis. What can save us from this? The external drama of these days, which has been driven by the virus, has brought the whole world to its knees. The reality of this period has proven that man is not the master of things, not even of himself. This gives me hope because from the greatest of men to the smallest, everyone will come to recognize the fact that Someone else, One who has loved us since the beginning of time, Someone greater than our thoughts can comprehend, is in control of everything and is the truth of everything. With Him, life gains true meaning and everything becomes infinitely attractive; with Him, we won't have to hide from anything or pretend because He makes even pain attractive for the reason that it bears within it the possibility of self-discovery, and also the possibility of knowing more the One who has given us everything. When I wake up in the morning, the reality before me, the cry for meaning in the reality before me, and the realization of my nothingness, all make it easier for me to get down on my knees. I do not brag about anything because I can't give myself even a second of breath—I am nothing without him. In the face of this tragedy, there's One who is not scared, One who wishes me the totality of everything and wants me to experience everything. I'm not scared because I am not my own source of strength. In these days, as always, the only person who can save me from nothingness, the One who can save the world from this nothingness, is He who holds everything together and is not scared of anything and doesn't spare us anything—this is the extent of his love for man. He gives meaning to everything.

Gladys, Kampala (Uganda)

Starting from the root

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For many of our readers, it has been a fixture on the calendar for over 40 years. The second half of August comes, and you go see each other at the Rimini Meeting for a week full of encounters and of a life which often leaves you changed. Only this year it is the whole world that has changed because of the pandemic. The annual cultural event will also be different: the streaming, how to volunteer, the exhibits... Everything has changed, “except the heart,” as Bernard Scholz, the new president of the Meeting, says in the interview you will read inside. This is one of the reasons our “Close-up” section on the restart of society begins with this: the attempts we will see in action beginning on August 18th at the Palacongressi Conference Center. The organizers will not only tell us how they intend to redesign a gathering that regularly attracts over 700,000 attendees and hundreds of guest speakers, but will help us better understand the roots of the event, the source that pushes organizers to accept the challenge of redesigning it while trying to offer something for everyone—even at this complex and difficult time. Because no matter what will come with the next “phases” of the restart, one thing is certain: it will be framed by a very difficult context.

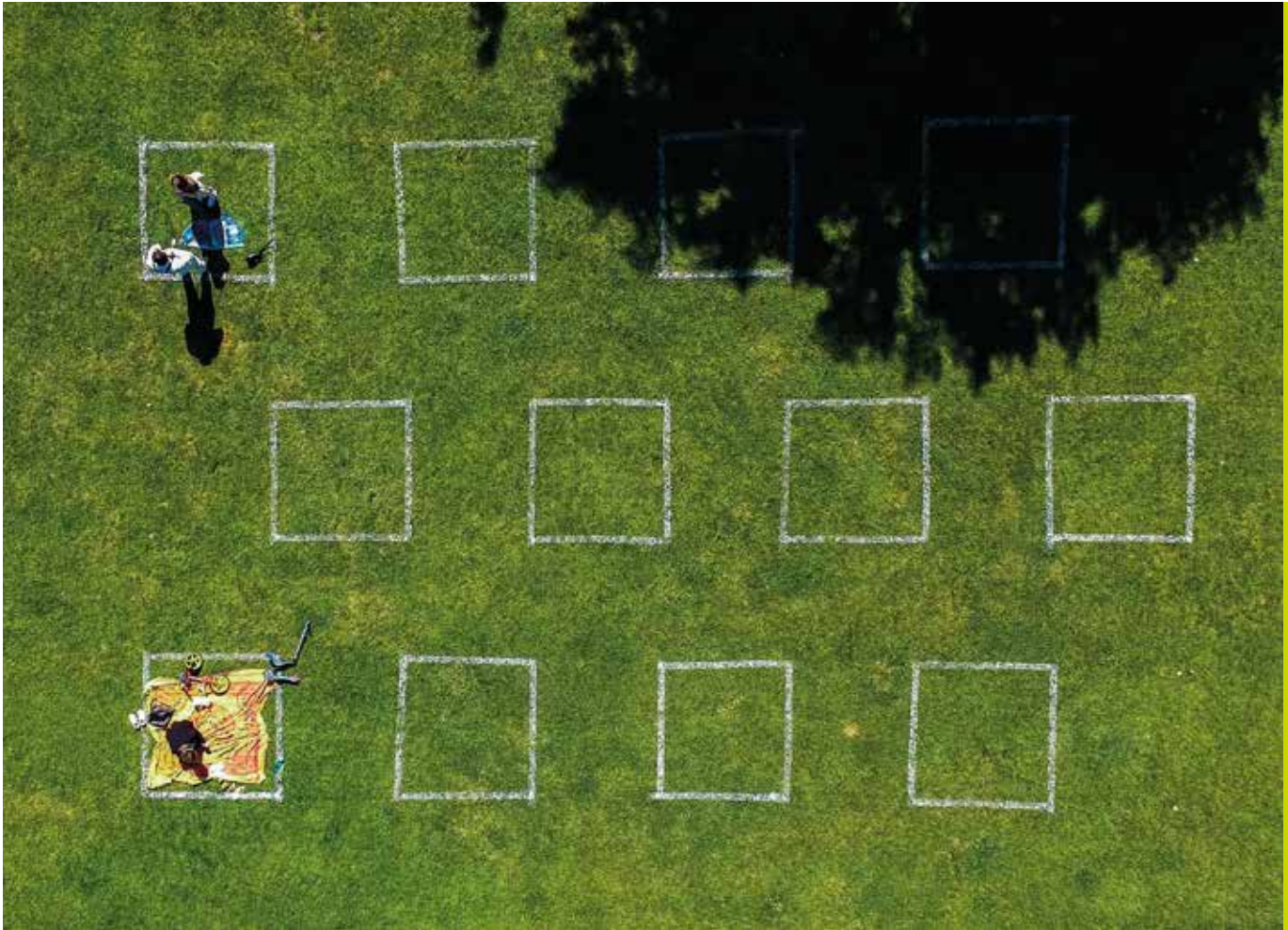
Though it is true that the future—of our global economy, of work, of Europe... basically, our entire future—will depend a great deal on the choices we make now, it is equally important not to lose sight of another fact: this “now” is an opportunity. The success of the restart relies entirely on the motion of a humanity that is awakened right now, that continues to deepen its awareness of itself and of reality in this moment. It is described well by three stories coming from different corners of the world involving different circumstances, but with one thing in common: to restart the engine, you first need to reignite the “I.” (dp) ■





Close-up

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Wonder and recovery



Luca Fiore

A very different edition, aimed at sharing ideas about all the questions of our time. And at learning what can “sustain us in rebuilding.” Bernhard Scholz, the new president, describes what it means to accept the challenge posed by the title of the 2020 Meeting: **“Devoid of wonder, we remain deaf to the sublime” (August 18th–23rd)**

The Rimini Meeting is starting again, with the goal of helping everyone start again. The announcement that the 41st edition would still happen came during full lockdown, amidst all the skepticism and confusion. Now that the most difficult moments of the pandemic are behind us, it seems clear that the annual cultural event is needed more than ever. Yes, it will be a special edition, held almost entirely online with a streamlined schedule of talks, exhibits, and performances broadcast from the smaller Palacongressi Convention Center in Rimini, rather than in the Fiera. The title is the same as previously announced: “Devoid of wonder, we remain deaf to the sublime,” as are the dates: August 18th–23rd.

It will also be the first edition with the new president of the Rimini Meeting Foundation, Bernhard Scholz, who, of course, could not have imagined the challenges he would face at the beginning of his term. He describes in the following interview how the experience of organizing Meeting 2020 has been emblematic of the time in which we are all living: even when everything seems to be saying that it’s better to give up, we find reasons and new energy to begin again. Perhaps not as we did before, but according to what is suggested by the present reality.

What made you decide to go ahead with the 2020 edition, while many events have announced that they are canceling?

While half of the world’s population was shut in at home, we realized that all the pain and suffering were opening up many questions about

the meaning of life, our future, our work, and the education of our children, the same existential questions we always face, but emerging in a new way. Many things we had taken for granted were no longer present. We began to realize that the Meeting, which is by nature a place of dialogue, could and had a duty to offer an opportunity to share these questions and introduce people whose experience can push others to rediscover what can really sustain us as we begin to rebuild.

These are questions both about our personal lives and about society.

Yes, at some point people began repeating the slogan, “It’s all going to be okay,” to try to give people hope. But what is hope? Is it simply optimism? Or is it something that can offer a firm grounding for life even in the most difficult circumstances? It is the latter, and this is true not only for each person’s life, but also for schools and the economy. Do we want everything to go back to how it was before, or to go in a new direction? Is it possible to organize school in a different way? Is it possible to create an ecologically and socially more sustainable economy? What changes are being asked of health systems? And what about Europe? What do we want to achieve when we talk about solidarity between countries? This set of circumstances has also raised questions about the fate of democracy. What does it mean today for a people comprised of free and responsible men and women to participate in building the destiny of a nation?

But there must have been a point when you decided to make the leap, despite the obstacles...

We were in the second half of March, in the middle of the lockdown, but we agreed that we would do the Meeting, no matter how restrictive the constraints. The stakes were too great. The more problems that arose, the clearer it seemed to us that the cultural heritage of the Meeting, with its 40-year history, was a fundamental resource, and that it was worth doing even at the cost of changing everything. And, in fact, we did change almost everything. But the heart of the Meeting remains the same.

With an edition that is almost entirely online, what about the element of personal encounter that happens at the Meeting?

There are objective limitations we cannot overcome, but the nature of the event will not be diluted. Many people who have never been able to come for logistical reasons can now connect online. And I am sure that this year we will see people participating with greater intentionality, more rooted in the questions that move each of us.

What do you mean?

Everyone, from their homes or wherever they go on vacation, will have to decide whether to connect or not. Participating will be a less obvious choice. Paradoxically, this format can bring us closer together. It may, perhaps, be easier to rediscover our belonging to a companionship of people passionate about life, about work, and about the destiny of Italy and of the whole world.



Bernhard Scholz was born in Müllheim, Germany in 1957. Since March, he has served as the president of the Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples Foundation. A management consultant, he has held the positions of president of the Robert Schuman Institute in Freiburg, partner at Praxis Management, and head of the "Business School" at the Foundation for Subsidiarity. From 2008 until the beginning of 2020, he was the head of the Companionship of Works [*Compagnia delle Opere-CdO*].

As you said, you had to change almost everything. Where do you get the energy to rethink everything and set to work again?

We have felt all over again the original passion that gave birth to the Meeting. It is a passion to discover the meaning of what is happening in a dialogue with others, which is a fundamental form of mutual enrichment. Faced with these dramatic circumstances, we recognized the value of what the Meeting has given us over the years.

What is this value?

It is living the vocation of sustaining humanity in the face of the challenges of life and of history, keeping human questions alive and helping people to see things more clearly. At the beginning of the '80s, for example, the challenge was an encounter with attempts to find freedom being made behind the Iron Curtain. There are many examples like that. Now, it is more evident that the drama is happening right here at home.

Where does this passion come from?

From an attraction to a human beauty and fullness that is expressed even in situations involving many contradictions. We see it in the many moving witnesses we have heard over the years and also over the last few months. They are personal stories, but ones that have an impact on society, politics, and the economy.

So, it does not all begin with a sheer act of will?

That's right. And that doesn't just apply to our gathering. Mere willpower is not enough to begin again; it's a waste of time. We saw this once the initial feeling of solidarity wore off during the weeks of the lockdown.

What specifically do you mean?

I'm thinking of the divisions that immediately came to light over many issues in society and the economy. Of course, dialogue is challenging; it is not an easy road. But it is the only way forward if our goal is the good of all, and not self-affirmation.

Isn't there a risk that the title of this edition, decided before the outbreak of the pandemic, does not fit the times?

We had that doubt at first, but it was immediately overcome by the paradox that this title highlights. Even at such a dark time, we have seen that wonder in front of reality, even in the most difficult circumstances, generates an almost indomitable sense of purpose. Our wonder at the "mere" fact that I and other people exist helps us to draw from that deep font of humanity that, in regular times, we do not even realize we have. Without this wonder, the recovery is impossible because restarting becomes just a calculation that involves bringing what we have always done back to life, trying to protect our interests. It is important to not flatten out that wonder, reducing it to a sentimental phenomenon.

Please say more about wonder.

Wonder is an awareness that what you have before your eyes is given to you freely. It is *for* you. As part of this awareness, emotion and reason run together, and it is in this running together that we open ourselves to life's most important questions and enter into dialogue with everything and everyone.

What about the sublime?

That, too, is often thought of as something ephemeral, when instead it is

the meaning through which everything receives its substance. Why, for example, during the quarantine, have so many people rediscovered the value of art and literature? Because they are back to seeking the meaning of life, of dying in solitude, of the absence of certainties; they are intuitively paying attention to the attractiveness of beauty. The title, which is a quote from the Jewish philosopher Abraham Heschel, states a theme that might seem adapted to happier times. But no: it is almost prophetic because it allows us to face the current problems from the right perspective.

What makes it the right perspective?

In order to face both the eternal questions that have resurfaced as well as new ones, we have to focus on the person. The questions prompted by reality open us up to the sublime, and so to the search for what is good, beautiful, and true: those things that, when viewed in an attitude of wonder, reveal a promise. This dynamic is what defines human nature, the person as a creative subject. We may have a lot of nice plans, but Who is the subject that can carry them out? Who is the subject of an education that truly generates? Who is the subject of a more just society and a more sustainable economy? Who is the subject that can create a better health system? Who is the subject that can give life to a more robust democracy? Each person must rediscover his or her own human vocation: the call to be, to create, to invest one's energies, and thereby find his or her own maturity and fulfillment.

How has this been translated into the program you have planned?

The talk on the title will be given by Joseph Weiler, an American expert on constitutional law who has enriched many editions of the Meeting with his reflections on justice and freedom and his fascinating talks on the Bible. The topic of hope will be entrusted to Fr. Julián Carrón, who has helped many people to live this dramatic time as an opportunity to, as the title of his recent book suggests, “reawaken their humanity.” The presentation of the book *The Embrace* by Spanish anthropologist Mikel Azurmendi will also be significant because it will show that a deep and lasting change does not begin with abstract projects, but rather with a new subject being generated right now. Another guest will be the Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, who will help us understand how the changes awaiting us are connected to the economy and to the life of society. We will also have witnesses from people from all over the world who knew how to face dif-

ficult circumstances in various realms of life by marshaling their creativity and involving others. I believe that all of our speakers will show us a hint of how they are living the “epochal change” referred to by Pope Francis. Many of the talks will refer back to his encyclical *Laudato si'*, as we mark five years since its publication.

Let's talk about the exhibits and performances. Will there be any?

They will be in digital format for viewing on our website. Two exhibits will also be available for in-person visits at the Palacongressi: “Living the Real”, a reference to the tenth chapter of Fr. Giussani's book *The Religious Sense*, and “Bethlehem Reborn”, which presents the history of the Basilica of the Nativity. There will be another exhibit on scaling the mountain K2, a symbol of the power the beauty of nature holds over us. Another topic that will be covered, in part through a virtual exhibit, is “Being Alive,” an exploration of what it means for something to be alive. There will be performances paying tribute to Beethoven, Dostoevsky, and Fellini, and finally, a concert featuring young musicians from all over Europe.

And what about the 3,000 volunteers we saw in previous years?

Some will be in Rimini, including about 150 residents of the area and people with technical expertise, something we especially need this year. Others will work with us remotely. In any case, all of those who are not able to come to Rimini will have a chance to participate in various ways, and to collaborate by acting as “ambassadors” who will spread the word about the Meeting, both in Italy and abroad, by sharing its content online and, wherever and however possible, organizing physical locations where—taking appropriate precautions—small groups may gather to promote and watch the talks being broadcast from Rimini.

This is your first year as president. No one expected the beginning of your term would be such an uphill climb. What is it you desire, today, for yourself and for the Meeting?

I would like for this Meeting to be a time to rediscover what really counts in life, and for that rediscovery to open the way for us to commit ourselves freely, passionately, and intelligently to transforming this historic moment into an opportunity for our humanity to change and mature. This rediscovery will touch personal lives but reach into public life. Deep down, the heart of the Meeting is man's desire that all people have a full life. ■

Close-up

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The newness we are looking for



Daide Perillo

Even in a “model” country that was not hit as hard by the pandemic, relief and precautions are not enough. In Canada, Paolo Palamara, an architect who designs skyscrapers, explains what it will take to rebuild.

Paolo Palamara has been an architect for 20 years and has lived and worked in Toronto, Canada since 1990. His firm, Diamond Development, builds skyscrapers and condominiums, typically luxury condos. About 30 direct employees and a network of 150 companies comprising about 2,000 people work for this enterprise, which has not been greatly impacted by Covid-19. Palamara notes that “here the construction industry has been designated as ‘essential.’ We couldn’t stop working—the economy is growing at a fast pace, people are moving... construction sites have not shut down.”

The outlook in Canada is not as grim as it is in the rest of the world, especially for their “cousins” in the US. The socioeconomic impact of the virus was contained by the strict measures imposed by the government. Canada is a wealthy country with a small population, so things are simpler. The assistance provided by the Canadian government is impressive, as Palamara describes: “Loans are either forgiven or have zero interest, \$2,000 a month in unemployment benefits to those without a job, \$300 a month to families with minors, no eviction of those behind on rent, government aid for business leases...Everything happened so quickly. One day an announcement was made and the

relief arrived two days later.” As a result, besides the low number of cases of the virus (fewer than 100,000) and deaths (a little over 8,000, a small number compared to the US, Brazil, and other countries), less poverty has been caused by the pandemic.

Nevertheless, even here the word “restart” carries weight. The relief and precautions could not prevent what Palamara calls a “strange illness” from surfacing that has given rise to new questions and needs (both positive and negative) that were previously easy to keep hidden. “The longest lines here in Toronto are at liquor stores,” he says. “The use of marijuana, which is legal, has skyrocketed. Just this morning I was reading that the risk of suicide among the unemployed has increased.” The cause is not poverty or inactivity. “This generation has fared well. Our parents’ generation were worse off—they lived through war and experienced poverty. They suffered and fought with an awareness and profound joy that we do not have. Now we are asked to stay put for three months, and even get paid to do so, and we think of taking our own lives?”

That is the dark side of a coin, but there is also a bright side. “Some newspaper articles have finally begun to ask deeper questions about the kind of world we live in.” There are also many concretely positive signs. “When the parks reopened, you could see dozens of people going there just to meet

“Our parents were worse off. They suffered with an awareness that we do not have. Now we are asked to stay put for three months, and even get paid to do so, and we think of taking our own lives?”


 Paolo Palamara.


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up and talk after many weeks of long-distance ‘hugging’ from their balconies.” This is unthinkable in a society so focused on the individual. “This shows that a greater desire has been awakened in us. To start over by trying to forget who I am, attempting to live as the old saying goes: ‘My freedom begins where your freedom ends,’ is no longer enough. This is evidence of change.”

What has changed? Palamara gives a clear example: “Now you can’t just look down when you see a coworker who is not doing well. You see someone who looks worried and you don’t look the other way. It has become normal to take a minute and just ask, ‘How are you? How is your family?’ It may seem small, but it is an important sign.” It is a sign of changes caused by the pandemic, and it means that in order to start over, we cannot return to how things were before, even in a country that was not as affected by the pandemic as other places.

Business owners must keep these changes in mind; they are not something abstract. This applies to how people work, even in the small details. Right now, buildings with 1,200 apartments are being built on Diamond construction sites. And a certain newness that is needed is affecting the designs of these apartments, including the walls and partitions. Palamara says: “During this time, I have been thinking about people needing to stay in their homes. They are often isolated and in very small spaces. What quality of life do they have? In recent years, we have grown used to ‘mini’ houses that are not very welcoming because they are focused on the individual consumer. People are incentivized to spend, and often individuals spend more than families do. The smaller the apartment and the less comfortable you are, the better, because then you go out and spend money...” These were open questions for him before, “although they were not as pressing,” says Palamara. “People

would say ‘I want to make the spaces more beautiful; I want to work on the details,’ but now they are more decisive. “We are reconsidering how we use space, so as not to waste square footage and not have corners of the house that are not well lit. Ten square meters can mean a lot depending on how it is used. A 20 percent reduction in expenses can make a difference for a family. We are rethinking all of these things: the use of technology and artificial intelligence to help create more efficient units and cut costs, the use of better materials...” For Palamara, it is not just about efficiency; rather, “it is about meeting the needs of the other, embracing the other with all of my humanity, another way of doing things.” But this is all part of a more important question: “You cannot talk about doing things differently without asking what we really need.” This is an important question to bear in mind at every step. “I have always asked myself what is a truly human experience, both at work

“You may see on the plans a line that does not convince you, and you realize that it is a flashing red light. It is a matter of knowledge. You realize that you can only offer a true response to yourself and to reality by obeying that flashing red light.”

and outside of work,” says Palamara, “but now I pay more attention to this. If you do not start from that question, nothing is worth doing.” He talked about how he learned this through his own experience over time. “I emerged from living recklessly, achieving everything, losing everything, and starting over again. But that is not enough; I know because I experienced it. I know what is like to buy something expensive and to be tired of it the next day because you don’t like the color anymore... it is dissatisfying. I need to have a fully human experience. That is what I have always looked for. This is why I am grateful to be a Christian. It allows me to know more and more what it is to be human.”

This gratitude is also connected to the restarting of our societies; it nourishes and sustains it. “Innovation, in my opinion, starts with this gratitude. More and more often, you begin to see what you didn’t look at before or didn’t pay much attention to. When you design a house, you start to ask yourself how many drawers the person living there will need and you think about where they should go. Or, you may see on the plans a line that does not convince you, and you realize that it is a flashing red light. While the rush and the need to control expenses might persuade you to say that it doesn’t matter, your desire makes you pause and say, ‘Stop and look carefully. Maybe a change is needed....’” This doesn’t arise from an obsession, “an aesthetic for its own sake,” but rather

“it is a matter of knowledge. You realize that you can only offer a true response to yourself and to reality by obeying that flashing red light.”

So that is the starting point. It has its origin in an “I” that is awakened and perceptive and less lonely if the person fully accepts the challenge. Palamara talked about a project that he began with a group of friends, mostly Americans. “We saw each other in February at the New York Encounter, and it was there that we agreed to help each other, not so much by solving problems or growing our businesses. For that, there are many business consultants I could choose from. What I mean is that we wanted to help each other form a judgment and to have a clearer gaze on life and work.”

The group had just begun to meet when the pandemic broke out. It grew rapidly because everyone had a great need for it. “There are all kinds of people in it: the director of a nonprofit, the owner of a lighting engineering company, an entrepreneur in the food industry, a high school principal...” It is a small network that during the pandemic has collaborated in *doing*—“a story told by a friend and quick exchange of ideas led to three tons of food being delivered to families in a poor area of Boston, for example”—but that more than anything wants to *understand*, to discover how to work and do business in a more truly human way. “This is what it means to help each other, first and foremost. I am grateful that a place like this exists. I am helped to judge every step”; that is, helped *to rebuild*. ■

“It’s your turn”

“You find yourself in front of something that asks you to leave problems unsolved.” Guillermo Erbeti, an Argentine entrepreneur, is faced with risk and recovery without an end in sight.



Alessandra Stoppa

14 **M**IT Maquinarias was begun 14 years ago and its history has been marked by challenges, downturns and recoveries, a defeat at the hands of a competitor 10 years ago, and the blockade on imports in 2012. “We have come close to closing more than once,” says Guillermo Erbeti, 43, who is one of the four partners in this Argentinian company that manufactures machinery to process food imported from Europe. Their market includes not only Argentina, but also Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay. The company has 23 employees, and together, they have found themselves facing their biggest challenge without an end in sight.

“**We are fortunate** not to have been one of the first countries hit by the pandemic. This allowed our government to have the time to respond, to halt all activity and to prevent the collapse of the health system, which is still functioning to this day. We hope that it continues like this.” As we write this story, Argentina is reporting a little over 1,000 new cases a day, a number that is increasing, especially in Buenos Aires and the suburbs (la Gran Buenos Aires, or “Greater Buenos Aires”) where Erbeti lives, in Ingeniero Maschwitz. He sees a country that has been impacted by the pandemic during a time of a complex political

situation, with a government that has strong popular support but is plagued by infighting and growing poverty, not only financial poverty after years of recession, but “a poverty in education and culture. This is clear in the public discourse, which is completely inadequate to the dramatic situation we are living.”

In this context, the culture of hard work has been losing ground “for over twenty years” because people think more and more that “the government will fix everything.” But the shockwave is so powerful now that the energy required to overcome it cannot be the task of any one person. This is especially true when the obstacles outweigh the assistance, obstacles such as import requests that are not approved and the temporary prohibition on paying foreign suppliers. It is true that MIT Maquinarias’s sector, the food industry, has been one of the last to suffer a decline in production, but “the pandemic has changed everything.” They have various kinds of clients, from those who are in the restaurant business (which has now been completely shut down for three months) to suppliers of large supermarkets to retail (which has suffered a 30 percent loss in sales), but due to the crisis, they have all been forced to resort to lower quality products and

packaging. “It is impossible to predict what the market will do. The factors affecting the market, including foreign debt, revenue, and political accords, are much more important than the pandemic itself... We are talking about a 10 percent decline in the GDP this year.” Erbeti, like a good engineer, is pragmatic about making the best out of the recent months in order to support the work of restarting.

The first thing that he has learned is that even though you are the boss, used to solving one problem after another, at a certain point you find yourself confronted with something that “asks you to stop. The problem must be left unsolved.” Working in this way “puts you on edge, but it also widens your horizons.” His technicians have not stopped going to the clients’ manufacturing plants to do repairs, but it is not certain that this can continue. Working in food production requires you to provide services continuously, and “you are faced with people who are afraid, who are going through hard times, and who we are not holding to conditions or obligations of any kind.”

“**I never wanted to be** a firefighter or a doctor,” said Carlos, one of the other partners, during a company-wide conference call in which the technicians asked why they should be put-



Guillermo Erbeti (left).

ting themselves at risk by leaving home and suggested that they do maintenance remotely. “We did not ask you to take the Hippocratic Oath to work here,” echoed Erbeti, “but in the face of problems and questions, face-to-face encounters with our employees have been a breath of ‘fresh air’ in the most critical moments. To accept the challenge has become a personal need: life is asking you to do this and inviting you to run some risks. It is not about trying to be a hero; rather it is a responsibility that I feel to maintain relationships with others, relationships that are the meaning, the heart of my work.” Not one of the technicians has refused, but no matter what happens, “I can entrust the other with everything because I have friends who accompany me in my life and are passionate about my freedom.”

What has been really helpful is “rediscovering what we have all seen everywhere around the world—how necessary it is that the other, each person, perform his or her work, from the doctor to the street sweeper. You understand concretely that work is not reduced to how much money you earn, but rather, that your job is connected to the good, to the destiny, of others.” Consider the employee to whom you tearfully apologized because he never understood the importance of doing his job, and for that reason, never accepted any form of correction. Erbeti said that this step is “invisible but crucial” and “allows us to grow in the workplace and in life because we see the factor that connects everything, that connects my action to the action of another. Our reason is active, it is broadened, it allows us to enter into the meaning of things.” Today, “leaving problems unsolved” is what it means for him to begin again. He has “an active hope that is expressed in gestures of fraterni-

ty.” He says that “standing before the great nothingness on the entrepreneurial horizon, there is a concrete possibility of arriving at a deeper ‘communal logic,’ starting from the client who asks for help with payments, to the relationship with some competitors, with whom we dialogue and exchange ideas and work strategies. All of our conversations are focused on finding new solutions to new situations. Nobody knows what to do...but the best thing is that a human solution always emerges. This is very clear while at work and when working with others because the answer is truly personal. The company cannot replace you. Nobody can.”

He is more certain now of what he has always believed, that “the strength of a business is not in stable capital injections, but in adhering to reality.” That is when people’s creativity is set into motion. In addition to assistance for their factories, the company previously offered clients employee training sessions. This was no longer possible “until an employee took the initiative and in record time and through sheer hard work, prepared a series of training courses on the production of meat-based products. She is teaching me that ‘the best’ comes unexpectedly. It comes in a way that did not occur to me. This is how I start again. Each time I see something ‘different’ happen is a sign of God’s loving presence. Therefore, I am grateful to be afraid and to have the possibility of overcoming this circumstance by seeing something different.” ■

This is my moment

“Tomorrow exists and is calling me.” A willingness to be renewed, difficult decisions to be faced, help for micro-entrepreneurs in Sao Paolo... Carlos Ferreirinha, a Brazilian manager of luxury brands, speaks about his situation.



Alessandra Stoppa

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Carlos Ferreirinha.

Carlos Ferreirinha loves to cite the words of the American sociologist Alvin Toffler: “The true illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” For him, re-starting has to do with a “willingness to be renewed,” and to “learn what you thought you already knew.” Born in 1969, Ferreirinha lives in Sao Paolo and is among the most influential *opinion makers* in Latin America in the realm of luxury items and premium business. The expert in marketing and design founded MCF Consulting, a luxury management firm, in 2001 and created Bento Store, a well-known and innovative brand of thermal products, seven years ago. Still, he does not have the air of someone who has “made it,” but rather the energy of a person always ready to question.

In the midst of today’s crisis, he begins with the impact that the unforeseeable circumstances of the pandemic have had on him. “I have allowed myself to take a deep look at my ‘I,’” he says, “from every angle—at the personal and profes-

sional level, and as part of society.” The first change in him is a different understanding of time. “Am I in charge of my time or not? Before, I lacked awareness: I felt like I never had time, but now I realize that this feeling was simply a failure to recognize that I am responsible for my time. What should I do with it? How should I engage myself with the time I am given?” That discovery was a springboard for another. “I always thought I had reached the limits of what I could do, but that’s not true. Right now, reality is showing each of us that we can give much more than we have settled for.”

Since the emergency began, Ferreirinha has made himself available to help his 30 employees at MCF any day, any time. He holds weekly meetings in which he asks each person to share “a difficulty or concern he or she is experiencing, but also a passion that most of us do not know about. There are those who write poetry, sing, or cook... It may sound like a talent show, but I think of it as a way of seeing the beauty in each person.”

In addition to making time for his clients and employees so that he can have compare ideas and reflect on things, he has decided to spend time collaborating with charities and NGOs; in other words, on “those dedicating themselves to the people most affected right now. I would like to be part of the movement that is transforming society. I need to.” He says he has always felt this need to give himself, to be available for others, but “the pandemic made this need explode. The other nourishes me, and I believe this is my moment. It is the perfect moment to connect one person to another. No one is quite sure what to do, so we are asked to be very attentive, especially those in privileged positions.”

He himself does not know if or how his business will survive, “but that does not give me the right to be selfish. In fact, it increases my responsibility at a very concrete level. Instead of me having two, four of us could have one-half, enough to get through the hard times and get back on track. Winning alone makes no sense—it is not actually winning at all.”

He is helping eight other associations with training sessions, fundraising, and collecting food items. In particular, he has been supporting micro-entrepreneurs with modest incomes on the outskirts of his city, working with organizations like *Aventura de Construir*, “using my network of contacts, my reputation, my history.” He has had a brilliant career, including working as president of Louis Vuitton Brazil, yet he sees himself as being like those he is supporting. “I was and will always be a ‘small businessman.’ Despite the high visibility of my work, I face obstacles big and small every day; I have my problems and challenges.”

He has no romantic ideas. The crisis has not spared his sector, and he has had to lay off 10 people. “It is very painful. I have a direct and personal relationship with each of my employees and a duty to accompany them. We face problems, doubts, and needs together and are working to find those who have been laid off other jobs. We are on a journey and have come to a crossroads. We still cannot calculate the damage and have to make dramatic decisions.”

As of this writing, there have been over 800,000 cases of the virus in Brazil, and over 40,000 people have died. Amidst the chaos, President Jair Bolsonaro’s decision to hide the data have aggravated tensions in Brazilian society. Ferreirinha is very worried about the extreme political and social polarization in Brazil. “Covid has immersed everything in uncertainty and anxiety” and has exacerbated the problems of a country which, in his opinion, “today projects an image of itself that is the worst in about a hundred years. I see it because I deal with international companies every day. From the point of view of luxury business customers, social inequalities have never been so obvious. We do not show any seriousness regarding important issues, first of all the environment and health. We are living the biggest environmental crisis in history, and we are going against everything that the international authorities say about public health. Then there is the extreme far right, speaking like a military dictatorship.”

He is very worried, but he is not crushed. “I am learning new things. We are called to learn again. For example, I am discovering that you can love in a way that is different than I thought... I was used to a life of constant travel, surrounded by people. My family is in Rio de Janeiro and now we get together every day to pray the Rosary; through that I am living a new kind of unity with them, more than I could have imagined.”

What sustains him is looking at things “with faith,” he says. “By faith, I do not mean a religious creed, but rather the principle of faith: believing in that which I cannot see. Tomorrow is there—it exists and is calling me.” The predictions for the future of Brazil are devastating, and he has not ruled out that this “tomorrow” might mean losing everything he has built. “I come from a humble family—my parents did not go to school and I worked hard to build things. If I have to close everything tomorrow, I will do something else to support myself. There are no miracles. There is just work. A lot of work.” What makes it possible for him to be free in the face of all his efforts and all he has built? “I don’t know. I know I’m happier this way; I prefer to live this way.” ■

Ethiopia



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Full of *life*

For a people stricken by hunger and fearing civil war, the pandemic is “an emergency within an emergency.” Salesian sister Laura Giroto talks about life in Ethiopia and in the missionary community of Adwa where they “evangelize by living.”



Paola Bergamini
photo by **Carolina Paltrinieri**

“I am in Alcatraz and can’t dig a tunnel to get home,” jokes Salesian missionary sister Laura Giroto during a Skype interview. What she refers to as “Alcatraz” is the mother house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Rome, where she is recovering after two major surgeries. “Home” is Adwa, Ethiopia, where she is a missionary. Once she was back on her feet, the 76-year-old went so far as to ask for a ride on

a container ship or a cargo plane to get back home. No luck. Because of coronavirus, it’s impossible. She is not joking, though, when she says, “Now the Lord is asking something else of me: the patience I have nev-

Sister Laura Giroto, 76, a missionary in Adwa, Ethiopia.

er had. He is reminding me that it is not my mission, but rather His work. My life is His. He does what He wants with it.”

The order sent Sr. Laura to Adwa, on the Tigray Plateau, in 1994. For months, a tent served as her home in that beautiful land filled with hunger and poverty. Today, the mission includes a school with 1,800 students from three months to 18 years of age, a hospital with affiliated specialist clinics, a project providing agricultural support, professional training centers for young people who are not attending college, and workshops for sewing, mechanics, and other trades. The Salesian sisters collaborate with volunteers and lay people from all over the world, the majority from Italy.

It's an impressive sight in the middle of nowhere. “There is nothing Providence has left wanting for us. We build and create in response to the needs that emerge. But you can only do this if you encounter Christ, because He is there among the poor. I have to go back to that origin every day, to that love for my life. Otherwise, how could you keep going in the face of a child who dies in your arms of a simple stomach virus? In the face of the constant emergencies? Sometimes I close myself in my room and cry and ask the Lord to forgive my lack of faith and be patient because He is both man and God...I am only human!”

The latest emergency: Covid. In February, the Ethiopian government officially denied the presence of the

pandemic, but there had already been cases in preceding months. “We didn't know that it was already present in many parts of the country or that the number of deaths was already high,” Sr. Laura explained. “The delay in receiving that news was because the roads, means of communication, and other systems are run by the Chinese. Ethiopia depends on China for everything, having made them its primary commercial partner. Only our region, Tigray, in stark contrast with the rest of the federation, closed the borders right away, monitoring all those who entered the territory.” All production has been stopped, travel is banned, and fresh food—like meat, fruit, vegetables, and milk—cannot be brought in from surrounding villages for the Saturday markets. In cities, electric generators are shut down because of a lack of fuel. There is no drinking water. People draw from the river, facing all the related consequences. It is an emergency within an emergency. “Blessed are you who *just* have coronavirus,” say Ethiopians in reference to the situation in the Western world.

After the pandemic was declared, many investors quickly abandoned the country. At the mission, following orders from the government, the school, workshops, and other activities were all shuttered, including the celebration of public Masses. But the people have not stopped. The last day before closing, the staff gathered small groups to explain the situation and give out free face

masks. The more than 300 employees were guaranteed ongoing paychecks. The mission is the only institution in the country that has done this. “An American foundation had donated a large sum to complete the hospital building, and we asked if we could use that money for the payroll. Providence...” The hospital is still in operation, treating everything but Covid because the medical equipment needed to treat it is currently stuck in packing containers in Djibouti. Those who are infected are reported to the authorities, but very little can be done because there is no intensive-level care in Ethiopia. According to their contracts, medical professionals can quit, but they have all stayed on. Among them are three Cuban doctors who, until very recently, were working in clinics serving rich clients in Addis Ababa. It came to the point that they could no longer stand to work only for the money and wanted to quit. When she heard this, Sr. Laura invited them to come to work at the mission at a third of their previous salary. They accepted. “They grew up under the Castro regime; they do not even know the sign of the cross, but I saw one of them cry when presented with a sick little boy. He did not realize it, but he was crying over a little Christ. They participate in the life of the mission, attending feast days and times for prayer. The Lord makes Himself present in many ways.” Little by little, as Sr. Laura speaks, you begin to see what it means to work in the Lord's vineyard. It's something attractive.

The mission is closed to the outside world. Beyond the sisters and the laypeople who live there, the staff has been reduced to the bare minimum. Thanks to its agricultural projects, which meet their needs for food and water, it is completely autonomous. In addition, the production of fruit, vegetables, and animal feed has been incentivized over the last few months in order to relieve the hunger of families. They provide food and water to about four thousand people each week. “The agricultural project was the cleverest idea the Lord has given us,” Sr. Laura says.

The story of the Kidane Mihret mission, named for the protectress of Ethiopia (it means the Covenant of Mercy, and refers to Mary, who clothed Him who is mercy in human flesh), is in fact a story of cleverness, or better, of the miracles of Providence. The story shows the good it represents for the surrounding communities. Take the question of masks: they did not have enough from the hospital and needed to make more. Sewing machines arrived as a donation from an Italian company, but what about the material, whose cost had skyrocketed? At the end of April, they received a call from the Italian nonprofit Banco Building, which salvages scrap materials from manufacturers and donates them to charity. “We received a donation of a few rolls of nonwoven material (the cloth used for surgical masks), are you interested?” To create a new workshop, Sr. Laura worked from Rome to direct the expansion of an existing space. She lifts up the paper with the plans so we can see it through her webcam. Now the masks are being made and distributed for free, and after the pandemic, the workshop will continue to provide masks for hospitals, which now rely on those produced in South Africa and China. They will be the first in Ethiopia to undertake that project as well.

In summary, the families connected to the mission will receive food, water, financial assistance and... beds. Houses in the surrounding villages have just one room, where everyone lives and does everything together: often up to seven people sleep in a single bed, the perfect conditions for spreading a virus. A few years ago, the Italian chain Coop donated and sent about 100 beds made in China. They were basically rods and screws, with no cross-supports. Taking advantage of the typically tall dimensions of the houses, the metal workers at the mission created four-level bunk beds: children climb up to the top, and the elderly sleep at floor level.

Sr. Laura says, “Providence moves in shocking ways when it comes to its poor... never leaving me any peace! When I got

sick, I was practically paralyzed. I thought it was the end of my missionary life, that I would never come back. And instead, within 24 hours, with the help of my doctor friends, I was in Italy being operated on by a brilliant surgeon. Today they say to me that you look so well! The Lord is the one who fills my heart.” You can see that it’s true even by video. After 58 years of religious life, she speaks of her spouse like a woman in love, just like in the beginning. “Here, too, in these circumstances far away from my mission, my life is full of other lives, of people whose stories are interwoven with mine. I keep them all in mind. When you encounter Christ, and when, in my case, you take vows, virginity is transformed into maternity. You are given a maternal gaze, even toward the elderly. Spiritually, I have given birth hundreds of times. Each of them has been like an only child; when one dies in my arms, I cry, and when one is saved, I rejoice. I know the stories of all the children I see playing in our courtyard.” She has seen enough to fill a hundred lives. “The Lord has given me much more than the hundredfold described in the Gospel. It has not always been easy, it’s true, but the difficulties have made the experience true and profound at a human level.” This is what the people of Adwa see.

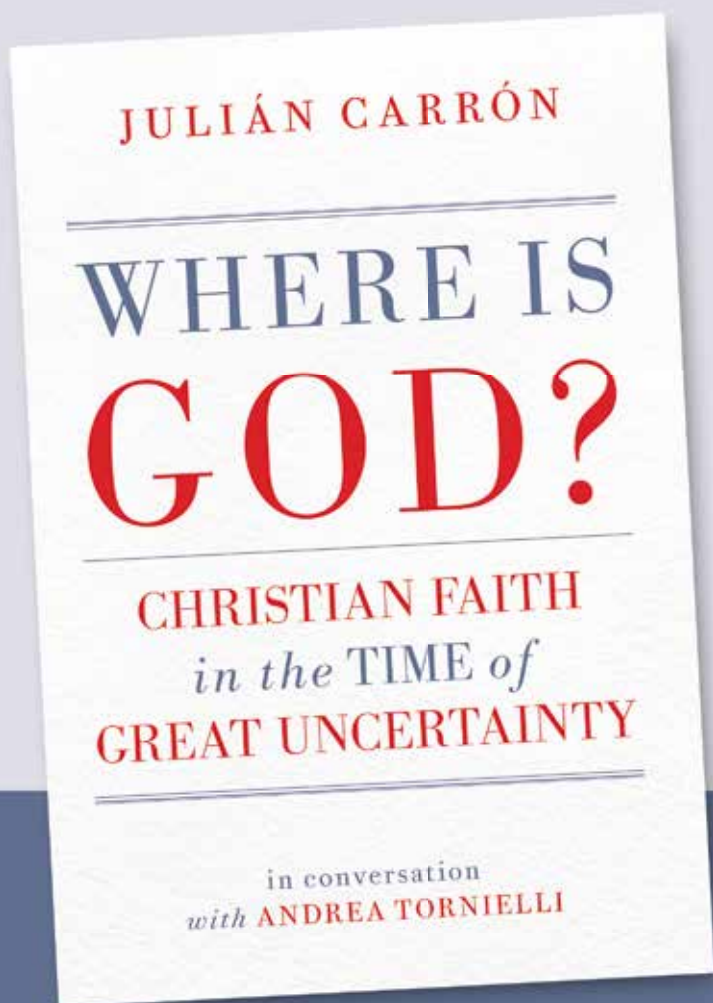
In general, Ethiopians are deeply religious. Their values are rooted in the beauty of God the creator. Because of this, the mission’s relationships with other religions have always been excellent. They engage in explicitly religious conversations only when it comes as a response to questions that arise spontaneously. To their Muslim and Orthodox neighbors, Sr. Laura and her sisters are the “virgins of Don Bosco.” Do they evangelize with their lives? “Of course. They see it in us, in the day-to-day shared life of the Salesian sisters and the Cottolengo missionaries and lay people, all of whom totally give themselves, like Giovanni and Eugenio, the *Memoires Domini* who came five years ago. Together with Anna, who gave us a year of her life to set up the hospital lab and has now returned to Milan, they were Fr. Giussani’s gift from heaven. They are happy people because Christ is an absolute in their lives; otherwise it would be impossible to survive. Watching them in action, I think that the richness of Giussani’s charism is what the church needs today, perhaps even more than an institutionalized religious life like ours. The prophetic beauty of the community in Adwa lies in this: religious, lay people, and married people of various cultures are a witness to Christ’s church, which is a communion of brothers and sisters present in a country and a continent torn apart by never-ending conflicts along ethnic lines. You evangelize by living.”



This is not just a witness for Ethiopians, but for the many volunteers of all ages who have always come to give of their time, effort, and professional skills to build up the mission. They come to help and discover that they are the ones in need. “In a free context, away from the influence of the workplace, of family, of the ‘pack,’ an extreme hunger for a real meaning in life comes to light. They have everything but at the same time lack everything. They need to speak of the human crisis they are experiencing and find a way to face it here. Sometimes I feel like I am a priest hearing confessions; so many people confide thoughts, questions, and even sins to me. Some unknowingly ask me for absolution... I tell them that they are forgiven because of the contrition they express, but also to go as soon as possible to a priest who can administer the sacrament and pardon them. They go home changed.”

The current situation of the country, in which many are stricken by hunger and fear that a civil war will break out, is dramatic. Politicians use the pandemic as an alibi for cancelling elections in many places. Tigray, one of the better organized regions, decided to proceed. “It is impossible to know what will happen at the political level. We just hope that everything does not break out into conflict and violence among the brothers and sisters of this one nation, though made up of different ethnicities. We, in any case, are always *super partes*: politics play no role in our presence in the country that hosts us. We have always respected the law and we teach this respect to our children: Salesian education is aimed at forming honest citizens and God-fearing persons. It is no coincidence that our relationships with local authorities have always been excellent. They value and respect us. No matter how things end up, we stand by the people and, as always, Providence guides all our steps,” said Sr. Laura at the end of our call. In the meantime, she keeps looking for a way to get home. ■

The school of the mission, which serves 1,800 students.



WHERE IS GOD?

CHRISTIAN FAITH
in the TIME of
GREAT UNCERTAINTY

Julián Carrón
in conversation with
Andrea Torielli

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

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

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

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

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