

The background of the entire page is a solid blue color. Scattered across this background are several large, five-pointed yellow stars. Two stars are positioned above the main text, one to the left and one to the right. Another star is partially visible on the right edge. A large star is at the bottom center, and another is at the bottom right. The stars are of varying sizes and positions, creating a dynamic, starry effect.

**“OUR DESIRE IS THAT  
EUROPE BECOME A  
SPACE OF FREEDOM  
FOR THE ENCOUNTER  
AMONG SEEKERS OF  
TRUTH. IT IS WORTH  
WORKING FOR THIS.”**

**(JULIÁN CARRÓN)**



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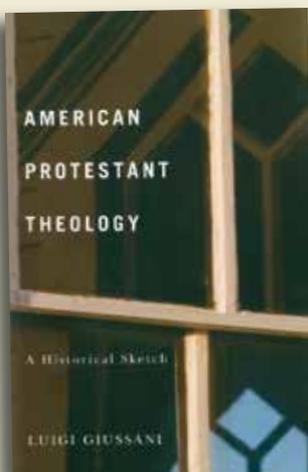
## EUROPE 2014 IS A NEW BEGINNING POSSIBLE?

Notes from Fr. Julián Carrón's  
speech at the presentation of the CL flyer  
(Milan, April 9, 2014)



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## LUIGI GIUSSANI



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In *American Protestant Theology*, Luigi Giussani traces the history of the most meaningful theological expressions and the cultural significance of American Protestantism, from its origins in seventeenth-century Puritanism to the 1950s.

Giussani clarifies and assesses elements of Protestantism such as the democratic approach to Church-State relations, "The Great Awakening," Calvinism and Trinitarianism, and liberalism. His rich references and analytical descriptions reconstruct an overview of the development of a religion that has great importance in

the context of spiritual life and American culture. He also displays full respect for the religious depth from which Protestantism was born and where it can reach, and expresses great admiration for its most prominent thinkers and spiritual leaders, including Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell, Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich.

Further testament to Giussani's clear-minded and comprehensive knowledge of Christianity, *American Protestant Theology* makes the work of a master theologian available in English for the first time.

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS

# JUST A LIFE

**I**t was a once-in-a-lifetime anomaly. A quirk in the calendar that offered two very different events in the space of a month, yet both were and are destined to take up much space in the newspapers and on TV. One is already quite literally history: it will be remembered as “the day of the four Popes,” that April 27<sup>th</sup> when Francis, in the presence of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, canonized two of their predecessors: John XXIII and John Paul II. The other date is still to come; it won’t be of the same historical magnitude as the first, but it will still have an impact on the future of a half billion people: on May 25<sup>th</sup> the European elections will take place.

At first thought, there would appear to be little if anything to tie these two together. At first. Yet, if you read the main article in this edition of *Traces*—the CL document that asks the question whether it is still possible to make a “a fresh start” in Europe—a link emerges, indeed.

**There’s a tiredness that abounds and a skepticism** so widespread that only mentioning the word “Europe” evokes negative feeling. In many cases, there is a clear opposition; in many others, a sense of abstractness. Or, again, the perception that an ideal has twisted itself into something very different from what it promised to be: in place of a space for freedom, we have a complex of bureaucratic institutions and busybodies which have swapped the means (economy) for the aim (the common good) and struggle to deal with a crisis that has been going on for five years. This is because they have lost those few, great things that brought them into being: the value of the person, work, freedom... and those “great deep convictions created by Christianity,” as Benedict XVI called them, that lie at its very heart. When they are torn away from their origin they lose their value. They are lacking, like a house without its foundation. What can respond to this need? From where exactly can “a fresh start” begin?

**It’s at this point that what we saw in St. Peter’s Square** comes strongly into play. Yet it’s not a strength based on numbers, the crowd, the eight hundred thousand people who had come from all around the world or the hundreds and thousands of people who followed the ceremony that was broadcast around the world. It’s not fed by an alleged “power of the Vatican.” It lies simply in the life of those two “men of courage” who “bore witness before the Church and the world to God’s goodness and mercy,” as Francis said. These are men in whom dwelt “a living hope” and “an indescribable and glorious joy”—a full, joyful, human life, capable even of changing history (as both of them did), but by virtue of that fullness that comes from faith, not from a project.

It’s not about juxtaposing those who believes, and those who don’t, of dividing the Church from the world. Rather: among the many shared traits of the two “Holy Popes” (and the other two present in the square) is the ability to speak to everyone and to meet with anyone who seeks the truth. It’s precisely because of this that their lives challenge everyone. Did they have an influence in their own time or not? Did they contribute in responding to the challenges that reality placed in front of them and their fellow men? And what questions are posed to us—to each one of us—by their testimony?

**“In a society like this, we cannot create something** new except by living life: no structure or organization or initiative can succeed,” as Father Giussani said years ago, “only a new and different way of living can turn around structures, initiatives, relationships—in a word, everything. And life belongs to me; it is irreducibly mine.” It’s a duty that touches everyone, wherever he or she may be. Whether that person be the pope, be in a classroom, in the kitchen at home... because it is only there, in the life that is born from a new source, that skepticism can be won over. And everything can begin, afresh.

T

## “PROF, TELL US RIGHT NOW: WHAT IS HAPPINESS?”

The very evening upon returning from the CL Fraternity Exercises, I find myself in a pizzeria with a group of about 20 of my former students. We see each other every once in a while to continue a thread of friendship formed when I was their teacher. I have in my heart the wound of the Exercises and in my eyes, Rose’s women. Will I find the essential in the weeds of my students’ chatter and allusions to things that I have not lived with them and that I cannot share? The evening begins very badly; everyone is bent over their cell phones. What am I doing here? I don’t give up; their humanity interests me because it is part of me. I raise my eyes and catch the resigned gaze of the student across from me. I ask him how it’s going. “Not well,” he responds, “I’m in trouble in two or three subjects.” “What are you doing about it?” “I don’t know; they don’t interest me, they have no meaning for me, it’s just studying.” I provoke him: “If you want studying to interest you, try to ask yourself what interests you in your life.” He remains silent. I notice a rapid movement to my right. Another is staring at me; he has heard two or three muffled words. I turn in that direction and begin again: “Guys, what is interesting to you now?” The one who had been staring says, “Well, Prof, we have to go to school, but then there are our friends, we see each other, we enjoy being together.” “So you are happy then,” I insist. “Yes. Well, sufficiently happy, but it could be going better.” “What does *sufficiently* mean? Is there something that you are missing?” Silence. Some think about it, some move away where the discussion begins to hum. “We are missing something,” one down in the back dares to

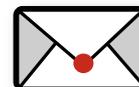


say. “Maybe happiness,” retorts the one who had been staring at me. “And what is happiness?” I venture to ask. This time, the thing has caught on. “We would like to know why we live,” simply states the one down in the back. “Yes, that is true,” says another, while he continues tapping on his smartphone. The thing is spreading; we speak briefly. “Does this question really interest you?” “Yes. Come on, Prof, give us the answer right now, surely you have it.” I am about to give them a sermon, when I feel as if my heart skips a beat. No, I tell myself, let’s accept the challenge of reality and of freedom. “I will not give you the answer, but if you wish, we can meet again,” I say. Then, some leave. A small group remains; they do not go. “But, Prof, you should have told us these things before.” “I did tell them to you, but you did not hear them. Now it is different; you can sense the hunger for what you are looking for.” Going home, I reflect on how I had felt armed only with that which I had encountered. We will probably see each other again.

Name withheld

## A QUESTION THAT DOMINATES AFTER THE EXERCISES

Dear Fr. Julián: It was the first time I participated in the Fraternity Exercises. While you were speaking, I had a great desire to return to everyday life, to experience in everything that of which you spoke. Monday, I returned to work and I received the news that I had not been awarded a scholarship for a five-month internship in Barcelona. My fiancé, Laura, is from Barcelona; she is already working there as a teacher. Our idea was to go there to live (we will be married on December 7<sup>th</sup>) because my work is more flexible, but with the crisis it is difficult to find a job. As soon as I received the news, I immediately tried to understand what mistakes I had made and what had not gone well in the interview. In other words, I wanted to find the reason for this defeat, only facing the problem, and not examining the nature of the subject that confronts the problem. When I recovered from my reaction of anger, I could not help but to look at what was happening in light of what you had shown us. I had so many things to do that day and, no matter how much I analyzed it, they weren’t going to give me the internship anyway. So I began to do what I had to do, not resigned, but entering into a profound dialogue with the Lord: “I do not understand why you are asking this of me. It is for my maturation and I am certain it is for the path taken thus far; show yourself in that which I am living now.” That evening, I spoke with Laura and I told her what the Exercises had meant for me and how, starting from falling in love with Christ, I discovered that I was more in love with her. She told me: “Everything is fine, but why does the Lord never give us what we desire?” At that point, it be-



## STUDENT YOUTH

### A GRANDDAUGHTER AT THE THREE-DAY RETREAT

In this photo, taken at dawn of a group of 10 young girls, one of whom is my beloved granddaughter, I find again the beauty and harmony that Christ gives us when, coming to know Him, we love Him. These young girls went one morning to the beach in Rimini while they were at the three-day GS retreat, to give life to their happiness for having encountered a special Friend. “Grandma, they spoke to me, to my life, to my heart. How was it that they could know me so well?” Here is the miracle that recurs again. In 1974, it happened to me, many years later to my daughter, and now to my tender, 14-year-old love.

Name withheld



came the step that was being asked became evident—one which you described as “purification,” going to the essential. The need to understand in what we should place our desire became evident—in the ideas we have or in that which the Lord makes happen? It was not an abstract step. For example: after having recited Laudes at the Exercises, I was struck by the beauty of such a simple gesture and now I have begun to recite them on the subway on my way to work.

Michele, Italy

#### AT THE TRAIN STATION WITH THAT “J”-SHAPED PASTRY

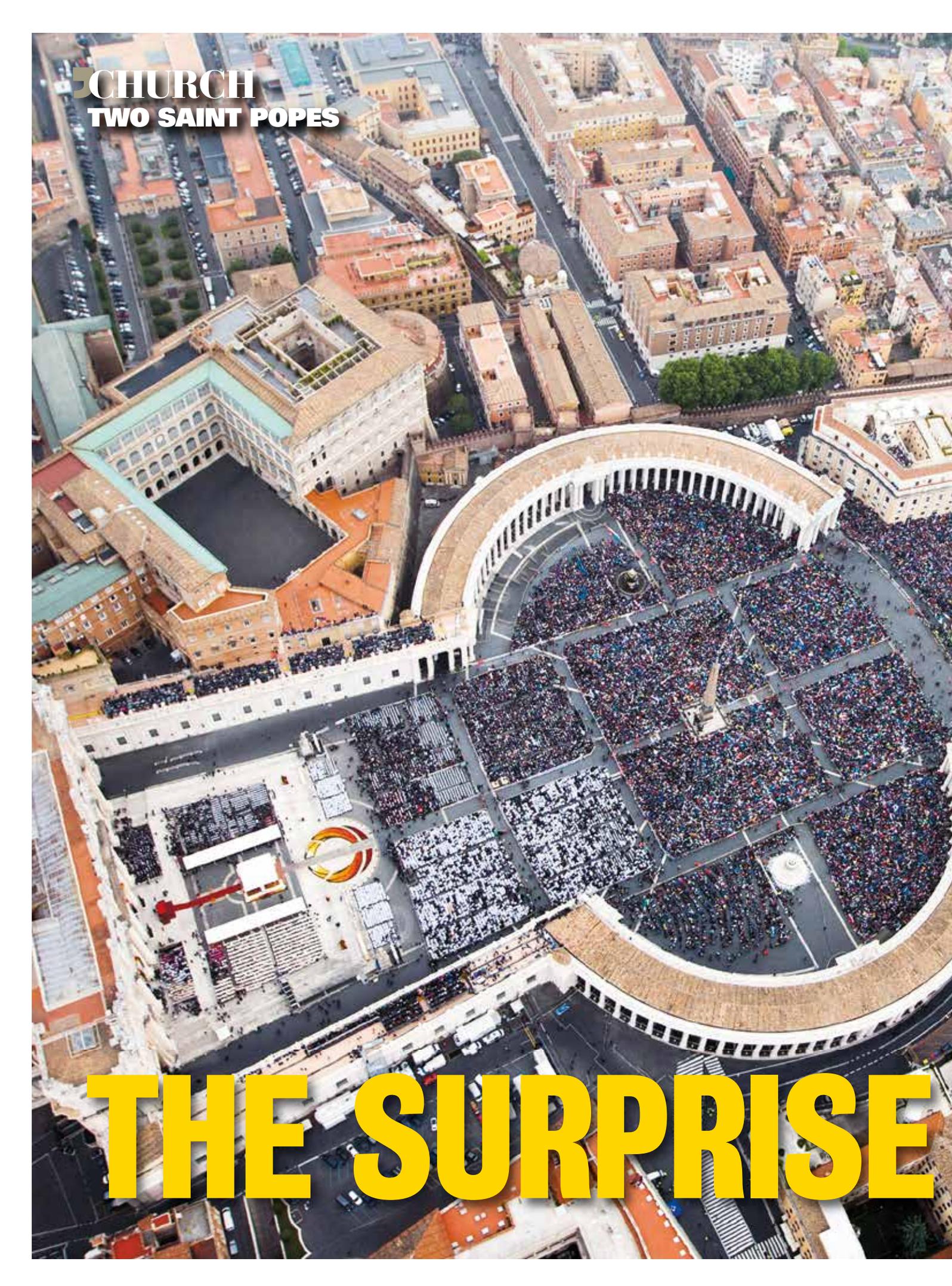
I was at the train station on my way home when I saw a girl twirling around on the bench and I realized that she goes to my school; she was alone so I went to say hello and asked her how she was. She responds curtly: “What a sad life; I want to die!” My first impulse was to console her, but right away I realized that that was not enough for me and I began to tell her about myself, about the experience of

the charitable work at school. I spoke of these things not to convert her, but because I needed to tell her these things. Then I proposed that she take the train with us in the morning, and she answered: “I don’t know why, but now I am a little happier, so tomorrow morning I will take the train with you.” Returning home, I thought: “If tomorrow she gets on the train and sees someone hit someone else, someone who sleeps, another who plays on a tablet, what kind of welcome is that? Then it occurred to me how I was educated in the foster care community called Cometa, how they had looked at me and had welcomed me. Arriving at the station, I stopped at the bakery to get her a pastry for



breakfast, and found one in the form of a “J,” the initial of the nickname we had given her. The next day, all 12 of us were there anxiously awaiting her, no one slept, no one played by himself. Upon arriving at her stop, I went to look for her but she wasn’t there. I returned to the others, yet I was not disappointed but rather I was moved by the path that J had made me take. Arriving at school, I saw her in the hallway and I told, “I will wait for you tomorrow!” The next day she came and we gave her a warm welcome. She was moved and said, “Why is it that you love me so even though you don’t know me? No one has ever done anything like this for me.” From there, the idea occurred to me to celebrate one of us each day, but because I am grateful that they are here. After this fact, everything has changed and I realize that celebrating another because he *is*, I also *am* and this day has been given to me to live as a gift, because God wants me here.

Francesco, Buccinasco, Italy



**5 CHURCH**  
**TWO SAINT POPES**

**THE SURPRISE**



The canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II was an event for the people. The emphasis on the “four popes” could have generated an atmosphere not dissimilar to one at a rock concert. However, it wasn’t like that. There was a precise message—one that each person was invited, above all, to seize for him or herself.

BY LUCA DONINELLI

# OF HOLINESS

Every narration should, at the very least, attempt to equal the story it's trying to tell. In my opinion this is the principal difference between "narration" and "interpretation."

Not that all interpretations are the same. There is, however, something that comes before everything else—it is the experience of that fact, the event itself, even before all of its universally recognized significance. All of this challenges one to go to the trouble of observing and narrating. This is what I would like to talk about.

Let's begin with the crowds that gathered in Rome to celebrate the two canonized popes, who are popes that are very much loved by the Christian people. Perhaps what happened on Sunday during the canonization can help us better understand what it means to be a Christian people.

In some parts of Rome, there were instances of disorder, due partly to poor coordination between the Vatican and the municipality of Rome. These things happen. On the other hand, the television viewer, who enjoyed a variety of shots taken from different perspectives, was struck by the order that reigned both in St. Peter's Square and on Via della Conciliazione, the main street leading out of the Square.

The Square was full but not crowded, clearly because the coordinators of the event saw the need, in such a situation, to have a little space to focus on the personal dimension of that event. The emphasis on the "four popes" could have generated enough hype to rival that of a rock concert, but it wasn't like that.

**TWO MEN.** In fact, there was a very specific message, evidenced by the order in the square and the celebration: it was a personal message that everyone was invited to consider for him or her self. It seemed to me that it was precisely this personal dimension that was being emphasized as the first and most



important message.

Pope Francis, in his crystal clear homily, did not present the two canonized popes as two promoters: "In these two men, who looked upon the wounds of Christ and bore witness to his mercy" dwelt "the hope and the joy which the risen Christ bestows on His disciples, the hope and the joy which nothing and no one can take from them."

Pope Francis emphasized the courage of the two new saints, but he was not referring to physical courage or an audacious temperament. Theirs is a different courage, one that comes from Jesus, from the personal companionship with Him, and nowhere else.

The Mass in which the two popes were canonized was altogether rather short. At the heart of everything was the Liturgy, which means "service to the people." Unlike other occasions in St. Peter's, song was an integral part of this service. The readings were the readings of the day, the Easter Octave, once referred to as Low Sunday; today, it is known as the Feast of Divine Mercy Sunday.

The reading from the Acts of the Apostles, which focused on the life of the early Christian community, offered an example of life that was aptly described in one of Saint John XXIII's well-known phrases in which he emphasized the need to value that which unites over that which divides.

Pope Francis' double tribute—at the beginning and end of the Liturgy—to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, bore witness to this pope's life which, not by chance, touched many people. That small, humble man with the joyful face is not only one of the most important men in the history of the Church but he is also one of the greatest minds known to of hu-

**This is the true strength of the Church, which bends the knees of those who will not then bend them in the face of the violence of the powerful.**

mankind. It was with boundless faith that he stepped aside; he did not think he was indispensable to the fate of the Church (he who perhaps bore it more than anyone). He presented it with that "fresh start" he spoke of to the world during his last General Audience.

This is, in my opinion, the true strength of the Church, which bends the knees of those who will not then bend them in the face of the violence and >>>

# WITNESSES WHO MADE THE ESSENTIAL VISIBLE

THE LIVING INHERITANCE OF JOHN XXIII AND JOHN PAUL II (*AVVENIRE* – APRIL 27, 2014, PAGE 1)

BY JULIÁN CARRÓN

**W**e must go back to the situation of the Church in the 1950s to understand the historic importance of the two Popes who are being canonized today. A Church that risked remaining closed in on itself, with great difficulty in establishing a suitable relationship with modern thought, needed an epochal shift to return to announcing Christ in a convincing and attractive way to the people of our time.

“The merciful forbearance of God for the salvation of the human person”—with these words, Fr. Giussani summarized the testimony of “the good Pope” who, in *Pacem in Terris*, had sensed that the “divorce” between faith and life in the baptized was the result of “an inadequate education in Christian teaching and Christian morality. It is essential, therefore, that the instruction given to our young people be complete and continuous” (n. 153).

Who could have imagined, only a short time before, an event like that of the Second Vatican Council? It required the simple personality of John XXIII to shoulder all the responsibility of convening an ecumenical council. Even if Paul VI was the one who guided the work of the assembly, the merit of convening it and establishing its first moves will always be Pope Roncalli’s.

As Joseph Ratzinger observed way back in 1968, he “is one of the few who are truly great, who, overcoming all fixed frameworks, experience personally in a new and creative way that which is at the origin, the truth itself, and succeed in giving it new relevance.” It seems like reading one of Pope Francis’ many calls to return to the essential.

If the honor for convening the Council rests with John XXIII, credit for having made his own the Council’s mandate and Paul VI’s eagerness for its realization, undoubtedly has to be given to the other Pope being canonized, John Paul II. After the upheaval of the so-called post-Council years (Pope Montini spoke of the period as a “day of clouds, storms, darkness, searching, and uncertainty”), in which one clearly saw what no longer worked, but had yet to find what could truly respond to the challenges of the present, the arrival of John Paul II represented a breath of fresh air for a Church in difficulty.

Perhaps only today do we begin to realize the nature of the impact his election had on the life of the Church. He turned back “with the strength of a titan—a strength which came to him from God—a tide which appeared irreversible,” helping “believers throughout the world not to be afraid to be called Christian, to belong to the Church, to speak of the Gospel” (Benedict XVI, Homily at the Beatification of John Paul II, May

1, 2011). As Fr. Giussani said, Pope Wojtyla embodied “the clear certainty of what the content of the Christian message means also for the history of this world, that is, faith in God made man, with the consequent enthusiasm for this Man, in whom it is possible to place all the hope of individuals and of the entire world.”

Who does not remember the impact of his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*? “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. [...] The man who

wishes to understand himself thoroughly—and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being—must with his unrest, uncertainty, and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter into Him with all his own self, he must ‘appropriate’ and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself” (n. 10).

With his personal testimony of a Christianity lived with unique awareness and boldness, John Paul II brilliantly re-proposed the theological foundation of the Catholic faith in the Trinitarian encyclicals: Christ, center of the cosmos and of history (*Redemptor Hominis*); God the Father, rich in mercy (*Dives in Misericordia*); and the Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life (*Dominum et Vivificantem*). At the same time, Pope Wojtyla also showed all the anthropological and cultural implications of the Christian faith for the life of the human person: reason, exalted and made healthy by faith (*Fides et Ratio*); morality, dependent on faith (*Veritatis Splendor*); the significance of faith for economics and work (his social encyclicals); the missionary nature of faith (*Redemptoris Missio*); and the capacity of faith to illuminate the mystery of pain (*Salvifici Doloris*), of human life (*Evangelium Vitae*), and of the family (*Familiaris Consortio*). Thus, men and women can understand the promise that the Christian faith brings along to respond to their yearning for fulfillment in all aspects of life.

In 2005, then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio paid homage to John Paul II, speaking of him as “a man who engages his whole person, and with his whole person and his whole life, with his transparency, corroborates what he preaches.” He was a witness who made visible the *essential*, that is, Jesus Christ, the One who saves the human and fills with gladness the “restless heart” of each person.

\* *President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*



» arrogance of the powerful in this world.

**THE STRANGER.** The Gospel reading was the familiar one about the incredulity of St. Thomas. In his essay, “Exegesis of the Commonplaces,” the great author Léon Bloy mocked those who saw Thomas as “the patriarch of positivists, that is to say men without faith,” and I am grateful to him for these words because it is true that our modern generation finds it very difficult to comprehend how that nonbeliever became a saint.

And yet it was precisely to Thomas that Jesus spoke the unique words, which he had not previously uttered: “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

What do these words mean? Are they supposed to mean blessed be fools and gullible people? No, indeed: believing without having seen means believing in the Church, in this group of sinners to whom Christ entrusted the ministry of His Presence (the Sacrament). Blessed be the intelligent ones, then; blessed are those who will have the simplicity of heart to recognize the signs of God in human imperfection.

On one occasion, I expressly asked Fr. Giussani who—among the many that he had introduced us to and brought us to love—was his favorite Christian author. I expected him to say Dante, or Claudel, or Péguy, but instead he replied, “Eliot.” In response to my question, “Why Eliot?” he responded that Eliot, more than all of the others, had the living sense of the Church—“The Stranger.”

The haloed images of the two canonized popes set against the facade of St. Peter’s Basilica are not special photographs; indeed, one might even say they are ugly. They bring back mem-



Floribeth Mora Diaz, miraculously healed by John Paul II, places a relic beside that of Roncalli’s. Below, heads of state attend the canonization event.



ories of images hanging at the back of the Church on the bulletin board, or those devotional depictions that some aging grandmother or aunt keeps, framed on the nightstand or hanging inside the front door or above the kitchen table where we eat together. Even this recalls us to an idea of simplicity that appears to be the true *leit-motif* of this ceremony.

The words of Pope Bergoglio dedicated to the two saints are similar to these images. In their simplicity, they too have a very clear pedagogy.

He exalts Pope Roncalli’s openness to the Holy Spirit, his being a “servant-leader” (on hearing these words, I couldn’t but think of the expression, a “companionship guided towards destiny,” which Giussani used to identify our movement).

He defines Pope Wojtyla as “the pope of the family.” If we think about the historical role played by this Pope in ending the Cold War, he who bore in the flesh the marks of a blind and obtuse hatred, the definition, “the pope of

the family,” would seem to be almost reductive.

If, instead, we think about how that same hatred has, over the past ten years, unleashed itself against the family itself, to the point of almost destroying it from within, then the connections become clearer. The family is the place of the person, where the “I” is taught to grow, and nothing more than this poses a threat to a power that wishes to be as pervasive as that of the globalized society and the so-called “one-mind.”

When one thinks about the four popes present in St. Peter’s Square on Sunday, one cannot but wonder at how odd Christianity is, with its saints who are so conspicuously different from each other.

**THE STRANGENESS.** In Christianity, there is no place for an imperturbable holiness that is indifferent to the flesh and the tangibility of life. We only have to think of the personalities of Roncalli, Wojtyla, Ratzinger, and Bergoglio: four people, four different “I”s with different ideas, different characters, and different opinions on many things. There is no predefined stereotype of holiness where faith comes to fruition in its coincidence with the human being: *vir qui adest* (“the man who is here”). This *vir* (man) is always an event; I would say: a surprise.

And it is also the strangeness of the Christian people, constantly exposed to suffering, sin, and death and often confused by ideology, yet so very rooted in the Mystery that those who guide it, popes and bishops, acknowledge its profound authority, to the point of proclaiming new universal dogma based on popular devotion, adopting prayers as universal prayers of the Church, calling councils for the renewal of the Church and the world. **I**

# A Fresh Start for Europe

At the end of May, we will vote for the European Parliament. Is this a useless effort, as many believe, or is it worth committing ourselves? We asked this question of Fr. Mauro Giuseppe Lepori, General Abbot of the Cistercian Order, whose reflection takes the CL flyer on the elections as its starting point. He shares his insight with *Traces*.

*Twenty-eight countries, 500 million inhabitants, more than 300 million voters. At the end of the month (between May 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, depending on the country), there will be the largest elections in the world, with the exception of those in India. Beyond the concern for all these elections is an opportunity to reflect upon many aspects of the context in which we live, hopefully* ➤

» without getting stuck in simplifications or, worse, getting caught up with partisans: Eurosceptics versus Euroutopians.

*The European Union, as it is, does not work well. Along the way, many of the ideals from which it was born have been lost. Deeply rooted ideals—first of which is Christianity—are now found in terrain that has become arid. The EU has reduced its horizons to a balancing of budgets and spread. This reduction is proving to be inadequate for facing so many economic, political, and cultural challenges. This effort relegates to the background the motives that catalyzed it and the goals that it has achieved. Indeed, it is not to be taken for granted that there has been peace and well-being for 70 years in a continent historically torn apart by war. Nor should it be taken for granted that it is possible to travel, to study, and to live in places of opportunity while elsewhere such opportunities are closed. It is not a given, and it is not guaranteed forever. We risk losing these things if we do not raise our gaze anew to higher ground.*

*Hence, the elections serve this purpose: to lift our gaze once again. CL offers its contribution, with a document (“Is a New Beginning Possible?”) that came out in March (see Traces Vol. 16, No. 4, p.49), distributed throughout Europe and on which discussions are taking place in various cities. Fr. Julián Carrón’s presentation, published as “Page One” in this issue, came from the first presentation of the document held in Milan.*



Martin Shulz and (right) Jean-Claude Juncker, both presidential candidates at the European Commission.

## THE NEW BEGINNING POURS FORTH NOW

“We busy ourselves with the search for solutions that are global and suitable to the problem, a measure defined by us! We no longer see that the solution flows from God.” To talk about a *new beginning*, the person, and freedom seems poetic and useless in front of Europe’s many problems. For Fr. Mauro Giuseppe Lepori, General Abbot of the Cister-

cian Order, “the crisis lies in believing so little in the novelty that resurrects the situation—to a point that we don’t see it.”

### What struck you about the flyer?

It re-proposes the possibility of discarding negativity and starting from personal freedom. That sentence, “The factors that change history are the same ones that change the heart of the human person,” reaches me on the problem of my life, on what I ask my-



**“What enabled the fathers of Europe to find the willingness to speak to each other, to build something together, even after the Second World War? The awareness of the impossibility of eliminating the adversary made them less presumptuous, less impermeable to dialogue, aware of their own need; they began to give space to the possibility that the others, in their diversity, could be perceived as a resource, a good.”**

*(From the CL flyer “Europe 2014: Is a New Beginning Possible?”)*

self daily, even with regard to my ministry. We always need to return to the awareness of what allows change; otherwise, we sink into desolation. This flyer reawakened in me the only awareness that gives me momentum. In fact, it gives me hope—a positivity grounded in reason that I’m experiencing now.



Fr. Mauro G. Lepori.

**What is the possible “new beginning”?**

When the only feeling one has is that things are going badly, one tries to grab onto something yet to come. But this race has the same alacrity as the violence, which does not find the presence of the positivity needed to stop, to reconcile, and to start again. For this reason, it is important to understand that there is a source of hope present now;

that humans, and things that happen have an origin that flows, and that stops the false dynamism of searching for future or unreal solutions, to be obtained with force. It is a matter of recognizing that there is something that could save the situation, and it calls me so that I might renew what I’m living; I might renew my heart.

**What is this source, and how does it surprise you?**

It is in what happens, in others, in the people I meet—it is in the presence of Christ whom I touch now. For this, one must be willing to stop, and to draw from someone other than oneself, one that is present, a source of life, the Resurrection of Christ. Something reaches you when you think that everything is finished, like the disciples

going to Emmaus. Right there, from an unknown place, a Someone arrives who sets your heart on fire, who says something new, who transforms your feelings and your ideas. We do not need to be concerned about creating this spring, but about having the humility and simplicity to see it flow. The disciples of Emmaus did not create that presence. It was a surprise.

**What does this mean with respect to the current situation?**

At the political, social, and cultural levels, it is important not to lose hope that this Resurrection always happens, and will happen again. It is enough to think of Pope Francis: suddenly, there is something that arises and that no one predicted. For example (a small one), sometimes I’m amazed by certain films. In a jungle of falsehoods >>>



» and vanity, a movie with depth and human truth jumps out at us and is recognized by everyone. The Holy Spirit continuously blows where it wills. I believe this is the point: Never lose faith in the newness that is always possible from the event of God in the world. The true crisis is to believe so little that it is impossible to see it. We are not asked to solve everything but to personally consent to that newness. If I can understand this, everyone can understand it, and everything can change.

**This turns our conscience upside-down; accustomed to thinking of history as “summation of progress,” it appears to us naïve to bet on the person.** It is not a question of strength but a question of freedom. A numerical quantity, even if impressive, is not freer than a single person who consents to something greater. What is asked of me is always to accept something that is given: to accept the newness of Christ. We have the same defect as David, when God punished him because he took the census. We say “yes” to God and then we start counting, to calculate the effect of grace, with a predju-

dice that corresponds to our criteria. We worry about the impact. Mary, after her own “yes,” did not count how many people there were and neither did the Apostles. One says “yes” to Christ and knows that the fecundity of this “yes” is infinite, even if nothing can be seen. We do not believe, so we measure it in numbers, political strength, and social bearing. This is the pivotal point of conversion.

**St. Bernard, the protagonist of the flourishing of your order in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was also a great political protagonist. Goffredo d’Auxwerre writes: “He made himself a servant of all, almost as if he had been born for the entire world. Yet he kept his soul free from everything and everyone as if he dedicated himself only to the safeguarding of his own heart.”**

St. Bernard is a great example of what we are saying: a man who puts everything on the line with Christ becomes a servant of the people. St. Benedict did the same thing: he had nev-

**“An authentic European political life is missing because the dimension of ideals is lacking. Having wagered everything on the economy, which has not taken off at all, people wonder, “What is Europe here to do?” At the same time, there is a growing idea of Europe as a relativistic cultural and political space, whose structures seek to legitimize, and even deem as rights, all individual aspirations, unmoored from the question of what the human person is.”**

From the CL flyer

**“Never lose faith in the newness that is always possible from the event of God in the world.”**

er thought of shaping Europe; he was only concerned with preferring nothing above Christ. It is as when Jesus meets Peter and asks him, “Do you love Me?” That focus on You who loves us and who asks for our love allows us

to serve a global endeavor. St. Bernard dominated his century and was so involved in politics that he was reprimanded. But that means it is possible to serve the entire world with the “only” condition being the commitment to love Christ; only then the rev-

olution, the immense work of societal and cultural renewal, the tackling of great problems, becomes possible. St. Bernard witnesses to us that the heart of the Christian experience has a universal influence. When we worry that society is not faring well, or when we worry about what we should do instead of nourishing what we do with the presence of Christ in the world and with what He does, then we become sterile. **I**

# EUROPE 2014 IS A NEW BEGINNING POSSIBLE?

Notes from Fr. Julián Carrón's Speech at the Presentation of the CL flyer.  
Milan, April 9, 2014

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### I. WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Europe was born around a few great words, like *person*, *work*, *matter*, *progress*, and *freedom*.

These words achieved their full and authentic depth through Christianity, acquiring a value that they did not previously have, and this determined a profound process of "humanization" of Europe and its culture. For example, just think about the concept of *person*: "Two thousand years ago, the only man who had all human rights was the *civis romanus*, the Roman citizen. But who decided who was a *civis romanus*? Those in power. One of the greatest Roman jurists, Gaius, defined three levels of tools which the *civis [romanus]*, who had full rights, could possess: tools which do not move and do not speak; those which move and do not speak, which is to say, animals; and those which move and speak, the slaves" (cf. Gaius, *Institutionum Commentarii quattuor*, II, 12-17; L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's, 1997, p. 90).

But today all of these words have become empty, or they are gradually losing their original significance. Why?

In a long and complex process, from which we cannot exempt the mortification of some of these words—like freedom and progress—by the same Christianity that had contributed to generating them, at a certain point in the European trajectory, the attempt took hold to render autonomous those fundamental acquisitions from the experience that had permitted their full emergence. Then Cardinal Ratzinger wrote years ago, in an address given in Subiaco, Italy, that, as a result of a long historical process, "At the time of the Enlightenment... in the opposition of the confessions and in the pending crisis of the image of God, an attempt was made to keep the essential values of morality outside the contradictions and to seek for them an evidence that would render them independent of the many divisions and uncertainties of the different philosophies and confessions. In this way, they wanted to ensure the basis of coexistence and, in general, the foundations of humanity. At that time, it was thought to be possible, as the great deep convictions created by Christianity to a large extent remained and seemed undeniable" (J. Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto e la crisi delle culture [The Europe of Benedict and the Crisis of Cultures]*, LEV-Cantagalli, Rome-Siena 2005, p. 61). Thus developed the Enlightenment attempt to affirm those "great convictions," whose evidence seemed able to support itself apart from lived Christianity.

What was the result of this "claim"? Did these great convictions, on which our coexistence has been founded for many centuries, withstand the verification of history? Did their evidence hold up before the vicissitudes of history, with its unforeseen elements and its provocations? The answer is in front of all of us.

Cardinal Ratzinger continued: "The search for such a reassuring certainty, which could remain uncontested beyond all differences, failed. Not even the truly grandiose effort of Kant was able to create the necessary shared certainty... The attempt, carried to the extreme, to manage human affairs disdaining God completely leads us increasingly to the edge of the abyss, to man's ever greater isolation from reality" (*Ibid.*, pp. 61-62).

**Person, work,  
freedom... These  
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significance.  
Why?**

**What demonstrates this isolation of man from reality?** It would be enough just to realize what effect this process has had on two of the things that we, as modern Europeans, hold most dear: reason and freedom.

"This Enlightenment culture," said Cardinal Ratzinger, "is essentially defined by the rights of freedom; it stems from freedom as a fundamental value that measures everything: the freedom of religious choice, which includes the religious neutrality of the state; freedom to express one's own opinion, as long as it does not cast doubt specifically on this canon; the democratic ordering of the state, that is, parliamentary control on state organisms; ...the safeguarding of the rights of man and the prohibition of discriminations. Here the canon is still in the process of formation, given that there are also rights of man that are in opposition, as for example, in the case of the conflict between a woman's desire for freedom and the right of the unborn to live. The concept of discrimination is ever more extended, and so the prohibition of discrimination can be increasingly transformed into a limitation of the freedom of opinion and religious liberty.... And [for example] the fact that the Church is convinced of not having the right to confer priestly ordination on women is considered by some up to now as something irreconcilable with the spirit of the European Constitution." Therefore, Ratzinger continues, indicating the ultimate results of the trajectory, "A confused ideology of freedom leads to dogmatism, which is showing itself increasingly hostile to freedom.... The radical detachment of the Enlightenment philosophy from its roots becomes, in the last analysis, contempt for man." Now, "This philosophy does not express man's complete reason, but only a part of it, and be-

cause of this mutilation of reason it cannot be considered entirely rational.” Thus, “The real opposition that characterizes today’s world is not that between various religious cultures, but that between the radical emancipation of man from God, from the roots of life, on one hand, and from the great religious cultures on the other” (*Ibid.*, pp. 42-43; 51-53).

This does not mean assuming a prejudicially “anti-Enlightenment” position. “The Enlightenment is of Christian origin,” writes Ratzinger, “and it is no accident that it was born precisely and exclusively in the realm of the Christian faith” (*Ibid.*, p. 58). In a memorable speech from 2005, Benedict XVI recalls the “fundamental ‘yes’ to the modern era” that it pronounced—without, however, underestimating “the inner tensions as well as the contradictions.” Benedict XVI thus emphasizes the overcoming of that situation of “clash,” in which “it seemed that there was no longer any milieu open to a positive and fruitful understanding” between faith and the modern era, typical of the Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Address to the Roman Curia*, December 22, 2005).

**At this point, we can better understand** what Europe’s problem is, what the root of its crisis is, and what is truly at stake. Let us turn again to Benedict XVI:

“The problem Europe has in finding its own identity consists, I believe, in the fact that in Europe today we see two souls:

- One is abstract anti-historical reason, which seeks to dominate all else because it considers itself above all cultures; it is like a reason which has finally discovered itself and intends to liberate itself from all traditions and cultural values in favor of an abstract rationality. Strasburg’s first verdict on the crucifix was an example of such abstract reason which seeks emancipation from all traditions, even from history itself. Yet we cannot live like that and, moreover, even ‘pure reason’ is conditioned by a certain historical context, and only in that context can it exist.

- We could call Europe’s other soul the Christian one. It is a soul open to all that is reasonable, a soul which itself created the audaciousness of reason and the freedom of critical reasoning, but which remains anchored to the roots from which this Europe was born, the roots which created the continent’s fundamental values and great institutions, in the vision of the Christian faith” (Benedict XVI, *Interview for “Bells of Europe,”* October 15, 2012).

What is at risk today is precisely man, his reason, his freedom, and the freedom of critical reasoning.

“The greatest danger,” said Fr. Giussani years ago, “is not the destruction of peoples, killing and murder, but the attempt by the reigning power to destroy the *human*. And the essence of the human is freedom, i.e., the relationship with the Infinite.”

**We distract ourselves in the debate over the consequences, forgetting that their origin lies elsewhere. Regaining the foundations is of the utmost urgency.**

Therefore, the battle that must be fought by the man who feels himself to be a man is “the battle between authentic religiosity and power” (“True Religiosity and Power: Notes from a conversation between Luigi Giussani and a CL group in New York, March 8, 1986,” *Traces*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2005, pp. 18-19; full text: Vol. 4, No. 2, 2002, pp. I-XII).

This is the nature of the crisis, which is not primarily economic. It has to do with the foundations. “In terms of the underlying anthropological issues, what is right and may be given the force of law is in no way simply self-evident today. The question of how to recognize what is truly right and thus to serve justice when framing laws has never been simple, and today in view of the vast extent of our knowledge and our capacity, it has become still harder” (Benedict XVI, *Visit to the Bundestag*, September 22, 2011). Without the awareness that what is at stake is the *evidence* of those foundations, without which a stable coexistence will not be possible, we distract ourselves in the debate over the consequences, forgetting that their origin lies elsewhere, as we have seen. Regaining the foundations is of the utmost urgency for us.

**Responding to this urgency** does not mean returning to a religious state or to a Europe that is based on Christian laws—almost a sort of new edition of the Holy Roman Empire—as if this were the only possibility to defend the person, his freedom, and his reason. That would be against the very nature of Christianity. “In so far as religion of the persecuted, in so far as universal religion, ... [Christianity] has denied the state the right to regard

religion as a part of state ordering, thus postulating the freedom of faith.... Whenever Christianity, against its nature and unfortunately, had become tradition and religion of the state..., it was and is the merit of the Enlightenment to have again proposed [the] original values of Christianity [all men, without distinction, are creatures made in the image of God, and they all have the same dignity] and of having given back to reason its own voice” (*L’Europa di Benedetto...*, op. cit., pp. 57-58). Therefore, what is necessary is not to return to an antiquated moment, but to undertake a path in which a true dialogue regarding the foundations is possible.

In these new conditions, where do we start again?

## 2. MAN’S HEART DOES NOT SURRENDER

Despite all of the prodigious attempts to set man aside, to reduce the need of his reason (by reducing the scope of his question), the need of his freedom (which cannot help but express itself in his every move as a desire for fulfillment), man’s heart continues to beat, irreducible. We can discover this in the most varied attempts—sometimes confused, but no less dramatic, >>>

» and somehow sincere—that the Europeans of today make to reach that fullness that they cannot help but desire, and that sometimes hides beneath contradictory disguises.

This example can help us to understand the nature of the problem, the reductions with which reason and freedom are normally lived: “Tonight,” a friend writes to me, “I went to dinner with two high school classmates of mine who are engaged and living together. After dinner, we sat and talked for a while, and the question about having children came up. My friend said, ‘I will never bring a child into this world. With what courage would I condemn another wretch to unhappiness? I will not take on that responsibility.’ And then he added, ‘I am afraid of my freedom. In the best case scenario, it is useless, and in the worst, I could cause someone pain. What I expect from life is to try to do the least damage possible.’ We talked for a long time, and they told me about a lot of the fears with which they live, and about how they already feel that they can’t hope for anything more from life. And they are just 26 years old.”

Behind the refusal to have children lies nothing but the fear of freedom, or perhaps the fear of losing a freedom conceived of in a reduced way, that is, the fear of giving up oneself and one’s own space. But how much will that complex of fears that blocks him determine his life? To speak about “great convictions” is to speak about the foundations, that is, the foothold that makes possible the experience of freedom, of freedom from fear, and allows reason to look at reality in such a way that it does not suffocate us.

The episode recounted above shows that “the bewilderment about the fundamentals of life” does not erase the questions. Rather, it renders them more acute, as Cardinal Angelo Scola says: “We must re-write, re-think, and therefore re-live what sexual difference means, what love is, what it means to procreate and educate, why one should work, why a pluralistic civil society can be richer than a monolithic society, how we can be able to encounter each other, reciprocally, to build effective communion in all the Christian communities and good life in civil society, how to renew finance and the economy, how to look at fragility, from illness to death, at moral fragility, how to seek justice, and how to constantly learn to share the need of the poor” (A. Scola, “Responsible for a Gift,” *Traces*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2014, pp. 36-39).

Re-write, re-think, and therefore re-live.

This is the nature of the provocation addressed to us by the crisis in which we are immersed.

“A crisis,” said Hannah Arendt, “forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments. A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with preformed judgments, that is, prejudices. Such an attitude not only sharpens the cri-

sis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides” (H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin, 1968, pp. 174-175).

**Therefore, rather than a pretext for complaint** and closure, all of these problematic points in European common coexistence represent a grand occasion to discover or rediscover the great convictions that can ensure this coexistence. That these great convictions may fade should not surprise us. Benedict XVI reminds us of the reason: “Incremental progress is possible only in the material sphere.... Yet in the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man’s freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew. These decisions can never simply be made for us in advance by others—if that were the case, we would no longer be free. Freedom presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person and every generation is a new beginning.” The ultimate reason for which a new beginning is always necessary is that the very nature of the evidence of those convictions is different from that of “material inventions. The moral treasury of humanity is not readily at hand like tools that we use; it is present as an appeal to freedom and a possibility for it” (*Spe Salvi*, 24).

But fundamental decisions about what?

**To speak about “great convictions” is to speak about the foothold that makes possible the experience of freedom.**

### 3. THE FOCUS IS ALWAYS MAN AND HIS FULFILLMENT

Behind every human effort, there is a cry for fulfillment. Listening to this cry is in no way taken for granted, and it constitutes freedom’s first choice. Rilke reminds us of the temptation to hush it up, which is always lurking within us: “And all things conspire to keep silent about us, half out of shame perhaps, half as unutterable hope” (“Second Elegy,” vv. 42-44, in *Duino Elegies*, Shambhala, 1992).

He who does not give in to this temptation finds himself seeking forms of fulfillment, but he is always exposed to the risk of taking shortcuts that seem to let him reach his goal more quickly and in a more satisfying way.

This is what, for example, we see today in the attempt to obtain fulfillment through the so-called “new rights.” The discussion that has grown up around them shows what the debate about foundations means, and what its possible outcomes are.

Since the mid-1970s, the “new rights” have become increasingly numerous, with a strong acceleration in the past 15 to 20 years. Their origin is that yearning for *liberation* that was the soul of the protest movement in the 1960s—it was not by chance that abortion was legalized for the first time in 1973 in the United States, and in those same years, laws regarding

divorce and abortion began to appear in Europe, as well. Today we hear about the right to marriage and adoption among people of the same sex, the right to have a child, the right to one's own gender identity, the rights of transsexuals, the right of the child not to be born if he is unhealthy, the right to die... The list goes on and on.

Many people feel these new rights to be an affront, a real attack on the values on which Western—and particularly European—civilization has been founded for centuries. To say it better: these new rights exercise a great attraction on many people—and, for this reason, they spread very easily—while others fear them as factors of the destruction of society. It is around these themes of “public ethics” that today—not only in Italy, but in all of Europe and around the world—the deepest social rifts and the most intense political controversies are created.

**Why this strange mix** of appeal and aversion? Let us try to ask ourselves where the so-called “new rights” originate.

Ultimately, each of them is born from profoundly *human needs*: the need for affection, the desire for maternity and paternity, the fear of pain and death, the search for one's own identity, etc. Each of these new rights has its roots in the constitutive fabric of every human existence—hence their attraction. The multiplication of individual rights expresses the expectation that the juridical system can resolve these human dramas and assure satisfaction of the infinite needs that dwell in the human heart.

Their common trait is that they are centered on a man who lays claim to an *absolute self-determination* in every circumstance of life: he wants to decide if he lives or dies, if he suffers or not, if he has a child or not, if he is a man or a woman, etc. This is a man who conceives of himself as *absolute freedom*, without limits, and who does not tolerate any sort of conditioning. Self-determination and non-discrimination, with this cultural background, are therefore the key words of the culture of the new rights. “The contemporary ‘I’—like an eternal adolescent— ... does not want to hear about limits. To be free means, then, to put oneself in the condition of always being able to access new possibilities... claiming to be able to reduce desire to enjoyment... to be pursued and grasped—mainly, in the socially organized form of consumption: of goods, of course, but also of ideas, experiences, and relationships. But, immediately after having attained them, we perceive their insufficiency. And yet, we start over again every time, focusing on another object, another relationship, another experience..., continuing to invest our psychological energies in that which, when put to the test, cannot but reveal itself to be disappointing” (M. Magatti-C. Giaccardi, *Generativi di tutto il mondo, unitevi!* [*Gene-*

**Not to ask the question regarding what the subject is, what the “I” is, is like trying to cure a disease without making a diagnosis!**

*ratives of the World, Unite!*], Feltrinelli, Milan 2014, p. 14).

This culture carries within itself the conviction that the attainment of more and more new rights constitutes the path to the realization of the person. In this way, man thinks that he can avoid or render superfluous the debate about the foundations, which can be summed up in Leopardi's question: “And who am I?” (G. Leopardi, “Night Song of a Wandering Asian Shepherd,” v. 89). But not to ask the question regarding what the subject is, what the “I” is, is like trying to cure a disease without making a diagnosis! So, since the debate about the foundations is felt to be too abstract with respect to life's needs, we entrust ourselves to techniques and procedures. From this position began the race to obtain the recognition of the new rights from legislation and jurisprudence.

**But the critical point of contemporary culture** lies precisely in the myopia with which it looks at the profound needs of man: not grasping the infinite scope of man's constitutive

needs, it proposes—on the material plane as well as the “affective” and existential plane—an infinite multiplication of partial responses. Partial responses are offered to reduced questions. But, as Cesare Pavese reminds us, “What a man seeks in his pleasures is an infinite, and no one would ever give up hope of attaining that infinity” (*Il mestiere di vivere* [*This Business of Living*], Einaudi, Turin 1952, p. 190). Thus, a multiplication, even to the *n*th degree, of “false infinities” (to use Benedict XVI's term) will never be able to satisfy a need of infinite nature. It is not the quantitative accumulation of goods and ex-

periences that can satisfy man's “restless heart.”

The drama of our culture, therefore, does not so much lie in the fact that man is allowed everything, as in the false promises and illusions that that permissiveness carries with it. Each person can verify in his own experience whether the attainment of more and more new rights is the path to his fulfillment—or whether it does not, in fact, produce the opposite consequence, since the incomprehension of the infinite nature of desire, the lack of recognition of the fabric of the “I,” leads *de facto* to a reduction of the person to gender, to his biological or physiological factors, etc. Here, the contradiction intrinsic to a certain conception of man that is so widespread in our advanced societies clearly emerges: we exalt, in an absolute manner, an “I” without limits in its new rights and, at the same time, implicitly affirm that the subject of these rights is basically a “nothing,” because he dissolves in antecedent factors, whether they be material, natural, or accidental.

**What does all of this tell us** about the situation of man today? What we have said also judges those efforts that op- ➤

» pose this tendency, but without bringing into question the common framing of the problem. Some of them, in fact, expect the solution from legislation to the contrary—and thus they, too, avoid the debate about the foundations. Of course, the right legislation is always better than the wrong legislation, but recent history demonstrates that no just law in itself has succeeded in preventing the drift that we see happening before our eyes.

Both sides share the same framing. T.S. Eliot's words are true of both of them: "They constantly try to escape / From the darkness outside and within / By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good" (*Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, "Choruses from the Rock" [1934], p. 106). This regards one group as much as the other.

But the attempt to resolve the human questions with procedures will never be sufficient.

Benedict XVI says it again: "Since man always remains free and since his freedom is always fragile, the kingdom of good will never be definitively established in this world. Anyone who promises the better world that is guaranteed to last forever is making a false promise; he is overlooking human freedom." Rather, "If there were structures which could irrevocably guarantee a determined-good-state of the world, man's freedom would be denied, and hence they would not be good structures at all.... In other words: good structures help, but of themselves they are not enough. Man can never be redeemed simply from outside" (*Spe Salvi*, 24, 25).

Is there another path?

#### 4. EXAMINING THE NATURE OF THE SUBJECT

Only by focusing on man and his constitutive yearning for fulfillment, his profound need, will we be able to re-write, re-think, and re-live values. In fact, "man's religious sense appears as the root from which values spring. A value is ultimately that perspective of the relationship between something contingent and totality, the absolute. Man's responsibility, through all the kinds of provocation that reach him in the impact with reality, commits itself in answering those questions that are posed by man's religious sense (or man's 'heart' as the Bible calls it)" (L. Giussani, *L'io, il potere, le opere* [*The "I," Power, Works*], Marietti 1820, Genoa 2000, p. 166). It is the religious sense, it is the complex of those ultimate needs that define the depths of every human being, that measures what a "value" is. Only the awareness of the factor common to all men can open the path to the search for shared certainties.

"The solution to the problems that life poses every day," said Fr. Giussani years ago, "does not come about by directly facing the problems, but by exploring more deeply the na-

ture of the subject who faces them." In other words, "one resolves the detail by further understanding the essential" (A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani* [*Life of Fr. Giussani*], Rizzoli, Milan 2013, p. 489).

This is the great challenge that Europe is facing. The great educative emergency demonstrates the reduction of man, his dismissal, the lack of awareness of what man truly is, of what the nature of his desire is, of the structural disproportion between what he expects and what he can achieve with his efforts. We have already recalled the reduction of reason and freedom; to these we now add the reduction of desire. "The reduction of desires or the censure of some needs, the reduction of desires and needs is the weapon of power," said Fr. Giussani. "What surrounds us, the dominant mentality, ... power, achieves [in us] an extraneousness from ourselves" (*L'io rinasce in un incontro: 1986-1987* [*The "I" is Reborn in an Encounter: 1986-1987*], Bur, Milan 2010, pp. 253-254; 182). It is as if they tore our being away from us; we are thus at the mercy of many reduced images of desire, and we illusorily expect the solution to the human problem from some rules.

Faced with such a situation, we ask ourselves: Is it possible to reawaken the subject so that he can truly be himself, become entirely aware of himself, further understand his nature as subject, and thus free himself from the dictatorship of his own "little" desires and of all of the false responses? Without this reawakening, man will not be able to avoid domination by all sorts of tyrannies that are unable to give him the longed-for fulfillment.

**How is desire reawakened?** Not through a line of reasoning or some psychological technique, but only by encountering someone in whom the dynamic of desire has already been activated. To this effect, let us observe how the dialogue between the young writer of the letter and his friends who are afraid of their freedom continues. The young man, after having listened to the tale of all of his friends' fears, affirms: "You are right to be afraid—you are intelligent, and you realize that freedom is something great and difficult, and that life is serious. But don't you want to be able to taste freedom? And wouldn't you want to be able to desire happiness? I told them that I am unable to rid myself of this desire! They remained silent for a few moments, and then said, 'That is what we envy the most about you, that you are not afraid.' And, when we were saying our good-byes at the end of the evening, he said to me, 'Let's get together more often, because when I am with you, I am less afraid, too.'"

No one treasured this experience more than Fr. Giussani, as simple as it was radical and culturally powerful, in order to respond to the question about how the "I" is reawakened:

**Recent history demonstrates that no just law in itself has succeeded in preventing the drift that we see happening.**

“What I am about to give,” said Giussani, “is not a response [suitable only] to the situation in which we find ourselves...; what I am saying is a rule, a universal law, as old as man’s existence: the person finds himself again in a living encounter [like the one we just heard described: “That is what we envy the most about you, that you are not afraid... Let’s get together...”], that is, in a presence he comes across and which releases an attractiveness, ... provokes us to acknowledge the fact that our hearts, with what they are made of, ... are there, that they exist” (*L’io rinasce in un incontro: 1986-1987*, op. cit., p. 182). This heart is oftentimes asleep, buried beneath a thousand pieces of debris, a thousand distractions, but then it is reawakened and provoked to a recognition: it exists, the heart exists, your heart exists. You have a friend; you find, on the street, a friend for life when this happens to you with him, when you find yourself in front of one who reawakens you to yourself. This is a friend—all of the rest leaves no trace.

“Above all, that of which we are in need at this moment in history are men who, through an enlightened and lived faith, render God credible in this world.... We need men who have their gaze directed to God, to understand true humanity. We need men whose intellects are enlightened by the light of God, and whose hearts God opens, so that their intellects can speak to the intellects of others, and so that their hearts are able to open up to the hearts of others” (*L’Europa di Benedetto...*, op. cit., pp. 63-64).

Thus one understands the good that the other constitutes for him. In fact, without the encounter with the other—and with a certain other—it would be impossible for an “I” that opens itself to the fundamental questions of life, that does not content itself with partial responses, to emerge or to sustain itself. The relationship with the other is an anthropologically constitutive dimension.

## 5. THE OTHER IS A GOOD

It is on this foundation—that is, the awareness that the other is a good, as the dialogue between these friends demonstrates—that Europe can be built. Without recovering the elementary experience that the other is not a threat, but a good for the realization of our “I,” it will be difficult to emerge from the crisis in which we find ourselves, in human, social, and political relations. From here derives the need that Europe be the space in which different subjects, each with his or her own identity, can encounter one another in order to help each other to walk toward the destiny of happiness for which everyone yearns.

To defend this space of freedom for each and for all is the definitive reason to vote in the upcoming elections for the re-

newal of the European Parliament, for a Europe in which there are neither impositions from any side, nor exclusions motivated by preconceptions or affinities different from one’s own. We will vote for a Europe in which each person can make his own contribution to its construction, offering his own witness, recognized as a good for everyone—without any European being forced to renounce his own identity in order to belong to the common house.

Only in the encounter with the other will we be able to develop together what Habermas called a “process of argumentation sensitive to the truth.” In this sense, we can become even more aware of the significance of Pope Francis’ affirmations: “Truth is a relationship. As such, each one of us receives the truth and expresses it from within, that is to say, according to one’s own circumstances, culture, and situation in life, etc.” (*Letter to a Non-Believer*, September 11, 2013). “Our commitment does not consist exclusively in activities or programs of promotion and assistance; what the Holy Spirit mobilizes is not an unruly activism, but above

all an attentiveness which considers the other ‘in a certain sense as one with ourselves’” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 199). Only in such a renewed encounter will the few great words that generated Europe be able to come to life once more. Because, as Benedict XVI reminds us, “Even the best structures function only when the community is animated by convictions capable of motivating people to assent freely to the social order. Freedom requires conviction; conviction does not exist on its own [nor can it be generated by a law], but must always be gained anew by the community” (*Spe Salvi*, 24). This recovery of the fundamental convictions does not happen, if not in a relationship. The method through which the “fundamental convictions” (person, absolute value of the individual, freedom and dignity of every human being...) emerged is the method through which they can be recovered. There is no other way.

community” (*Spe Salvi*, 24). This recovery of the fundamental convictions does not happen, if not in a relationship. The method through which the “fundamental convictions” (person, absolute value of the individual, freedom and dignity of every human being...) emerged is the method through which they can be recovered. There is no other way.

**We Christians are not afraid** to enter, without privileges, into this wide-ranging dialogue. This is, for us, a precious occasion to verify the capacity of the Christian event to hold up in front of new challenges, since it offers us the opportunity to witness to everyone what happens in existence when man intercepts the Christian event along the road of life. Our experience, in the encounter with Christianity, has shown us that the lifeblood of the values of the person are not Christian laws or juridical structures and confessional politics, but the event of Christ. For this reason, we do not place our hope, for ourselves or for others, in anything but the re-occurrence of the event of Christ in a human encounter. This does not in any way mean that we are contrasting the dimension of >>>

**You have a friend; you find, on the street, a friend for life when you find yourself in front of one who reawakens you to yourself. All of the rest leaves no trace.**

» the event and the dimension of the law, but that we recognize a genetic order among them. It is precisely the re-occurrence of the Christian event that allows the intelligence of faith to become intelligence of reality, and thus able to offer an original and significant contribution by bringing to life those convictions that can be introduced into the community organization.

This is the clarification that lies at the heart of *Evangelii Gaudium*: the observation that, in the Catholic world, the battle for the defense of values has, over time, become so pre-eminent that it ends up being more important than the communication of the novelty of Christ, the witness of His humanity. This exchange of antecedent and consequent demonstrates the “Pelagian” error of much of today’s Christianity—the promotion of a “Christianist” Christianity (Rémi Brague), deprived of Grace. The alternative is not found, as some people complain, in a “spiritualistic” flight from the world. Rather, the true alternative, as we have seen, is the Christian community—when not emptied of its historic substance—which offers its original contribution “by reawakening in men, through faith, the forces of authentic liberation” (Benedict XVI, in *Accanto a Giovanni Paolo II [Alongside John Paul II]*, Ares, Milan 2014, p. 18).

Those who are engaged in public life, in the cultural or political fields, have the duty, as Christians, to oppose today’s anthropological drift. But this is an undertaking that cannot involve the entire Church as such, as it has the obligation, today, to encounter all men, independently of their ideology or political affinity, in order to witness the “attraction of Jesus.” The commitment of Christians in politics and in the spheres where the common good of men is decided remains necessary. In fact, through the Church’s model of social doctrine, it indicates the formulas of shared coexistence that Christian experience has verified. Today, this is more important than ever—without ever forgetting that, in the present circumstances, such an undertaking assumes, in the Pauline sense, more of a certain *katechontic* value, that is, critical of and containing, within the limits of possibility, the negative effects of pure procedures and of the mentality that creates them. It cannot, however, presume that, from its action, no matter how praiseworthy, the ideal and spiritual renewal of the city of men can mechanically arise. This is born from “what comes before,” *primerea*, from a new humanity generated by love for Christ, by Christ’s love.

**It is this awareness that allows us** to see the limits of the positions of those—on one side or the other—who believe that they can resolve everything through procedures or laws, and thus think that defending a space of freedom is too little. Many would like the attainment of rights, or their prohi-

bition, to be ensured by politics. In this way, they would be spared “being good,” as Eliot said. What does the fact that “not even the truly grandiose effort of Kant was able to create the necessary shared certainty” teach us? What do we learn from our recent history, having seen that good laws were not enough to keep the great convictions alive? There is a long road to a “shared certainty” (*L’Europa di Benedetto...*, op. cit., p. 62).

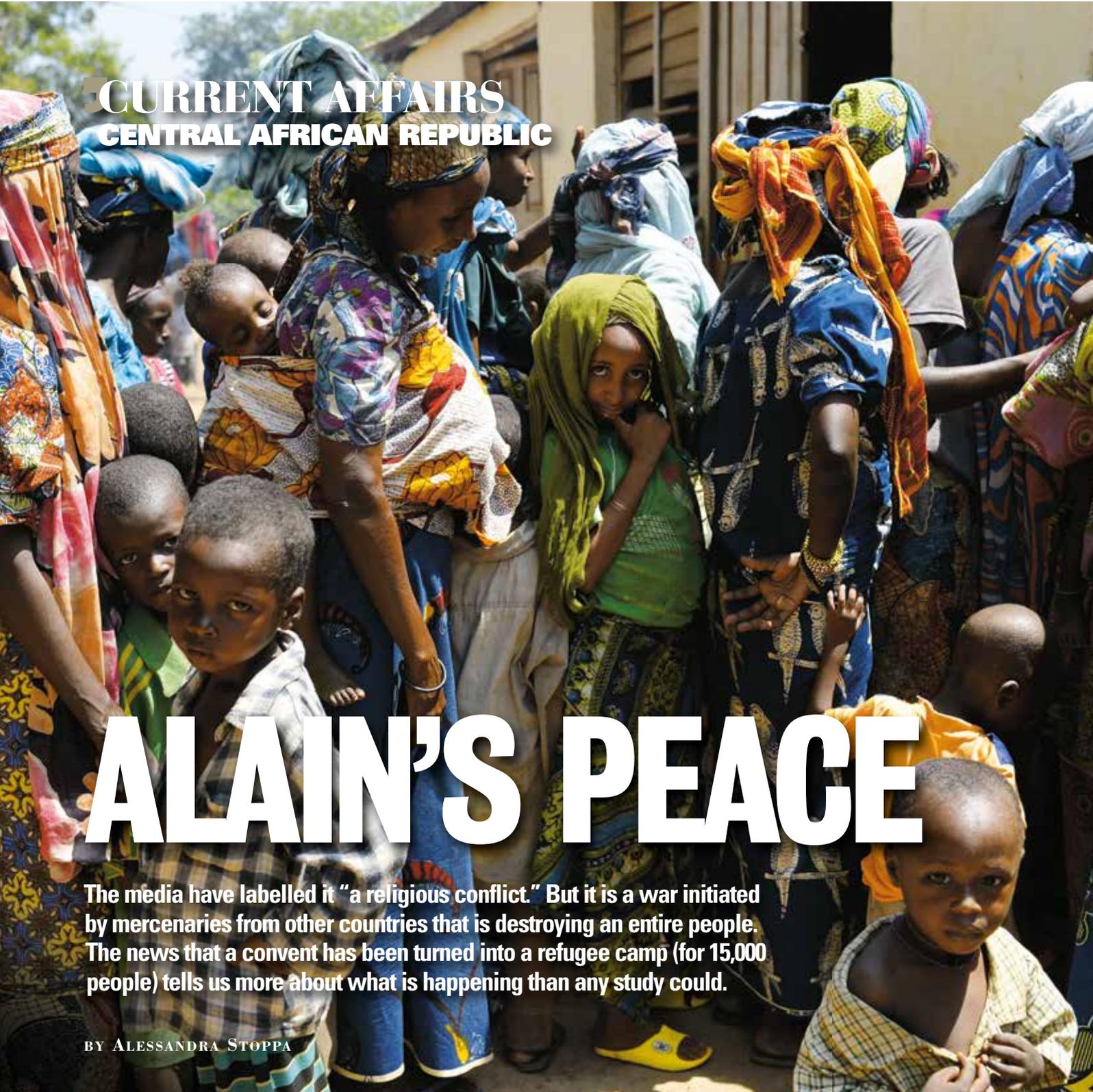
**The path that the Church has traveled** in order to clarify the concept of “religious freedom” can help us to understand that defending the space of this freedom is not, perhaps, so little. After much labor, in the Second Vatican Council, the Church came to declare that “the human person has a right to religious freedom,” while it continues to profess Christianity as the only “true religion.” The recognition of religious freedom is not a sort of compromise, as if one were to say, “Since we were unable to convince mankind that Christianity is the true religion, let’s at least defend religious freedom.” No, the reason that pushed the Church to modify an approach that had been in place for many centuries was a deeper understanding of the nature of truth and of the path to reaching it: “The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth.” This was the firm belief of the Church in the first centuries, the great Christian revolution founded on the distinction between

the two cities, between God and Caesar. This belief was destined to weaken after the Edict of Thessalonica (380 AD), thanks to the emperor Theodosius. In a return to the patristic spirit, Vatican II could affirm that “all men are to be immune from coercion... in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.” And finally, “This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right” (Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, December 7, 1965, 1,2). If this has to be said for the greatest value, then even more so for all of the others!

Only if Europe becomes a space of freedom, where each person can be immune from coercion, make his own human journey, and share it with those whom he finds on his path, will the interest be reawakened for dialogue, for an encounter in which each person offers the contribution of his experience in order to reach that “shared certainty” that is necessary for life in common.

Our desire is that Europe become a space of freedom for the encounter among seekers of truth. It is worth working for this. ■

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# ALAIN'S PEACE

The media have labelled it “a religious conflict.” But it is a war initiated by mercenaries from other countries that is destroying an entire people. The news that a convent has been turned into a refugee camp (for 15,000 people) tells us more about what is happening than any study could.

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

**F**ather Federico arrived in Carmel on the outskirts of the capital in Bangui only three months ago. From the courtyard of the convent, which was supposed to have been an oil mill, he gazes out at the palm plantation and thinks about Father Anastasio and his love for teak trees. It was he who purchased this piece of for-

est in the '90s and transformed it into a garden and nursery. He would plant and say, “They will be useful in 40 years’ time.” Even sooner.

The story about the convent of Dis-calced Carmelites that has been turned into a refugee camp begins on the morning of December 5<sup>th</sup> when they hear the sound of shooting and shouting in the distance. Father Federico

abandons his breakfast and rushes to open the doors of Carmel. They have not been closed since. He lets in men, women, children, many young people, and entire families who are fleeing their villages. At the time, he did not know what was happening. He only understood afterwards that tensions which had been growing for months had suddenly caused the situation to de- ➤

» generate. Since that morning, Central African Republic has been in the throes of one of the three greatest ongoing humanitarian crises, together with Syria and South Sudan, and of these three it is the most forgotten. There are more than 600,000 internally displaced people, 2,000 official victims, and more than one and a half million people without food.

**THE FACTS.** The crisis in the country began on March 24, 2013, when the coup by Michel Djotodia, which forced the president, François Bozizé, to flee, destroyed the administrative and economic system and left the people in the hands of an armed coalition of Séléka: rebel groups of mercenaries from Chad and South Sudan. Violence, lootings, killings, entire villages burned to the ground... “In a word, they have destroyed the life of a nation,” wrote the bishops of the country, who also denounce the popular reaction from the people: the anger of the self-defence “anti-balaka” squads (*balaka* means machete), who are armed for revenge. Western media quickly labelled it “a conflict between Muslim and majority Christian rebels.” But life at Carmel in these months helps us understand what is happening more than any of our erroneous assumptions.

On the evening of that first day, in the courtyard between the church and the refectory, 600 people found refuge and the twelve brothers, some priests and some aspirants, attempted to provide a hot meal to everyone. “I think it might be more prudent not to go to school for a few days,” wrote Father Federico the next day. He could not have imagined then that by Christmas there would be 10,000 refugees and,



Here, Father Federico Trincherero with the “guests” at the convent. On the right: members of the anti-balaka.

only a short while later, that the figure would rise to 15,000—all still with them today. But one thing was clear to him from the very beginning: “These guests are a gift that we want to embrace.”

You can understand Father Federico Trincherero from a detail. At the end of the first week, he had to submit the number of refugees as part of a request for food assistance. He started to count them. But he didn’t want to be noticed: he didn’t want anyone to think that there wasn’t room for him or her. From the Italian region of Piedmont, he was appointed, at the age of 35, prior and teacher to prepare novices. He dreamed of doing a doctorate in Patrology but found himself with an honorary degree in Management ... of a refugee camp conferred on him by the UN High Commissioner. “Life always provides some beautiful surprises,” he says with conviction. He has not lost his simplicity of heart in this ongoing

war. He talks about the shock of the attacks, the lack of food, the mothers intent on comforting their children, and the men intent on building huts with Father Anastasio’s teak trees and palm branches. When he called the Nunciature to ask for help, he discovered that the other religious communities were experiencing the same situation. Then came the sound of the first fighter planes crossing the sky, at which the people applauded and cried.

But it won’t be the arrival of the French, or the new woman president, Catherine Samba-Panza, elected on January 20<sup>th</sup>, who will give hope to live. It is something else that brought Alain, a 19-year-old refugee, to Father Federico after living among them for months: “I have to speak to you, my Father: I want to be like you.” The possibility of a vocation was born like the gift of a flower in wartime. “Could I have your book also?” That is, the breviary. “When you pray, I can only say *dans les siècles des siècles...*” After Alain, another came, John. “It is a miracle



when a young person manifests a desire to consecrate himself to God,” says Father Federico. “But discernment is a difficult thing in most cases, even more so in these parts.” He breaks off: “Their vocation is in God’s hands now and in your prayers.” But what have these boys seen? “In the middle of hell, Carmel is a place of beauty, of rationality, because it is a sign of the divine. Here, the one who is poorest, weakest, smallest, is the most important. Only Jesus saves man, and these people need the Gospel. Even though we are poor sinners, we are a presence of peace. Without Christ, they would have eaten one another here.”

**REMAINING IS EVERYTHING.** The Church did not rush in faster than the other aid associations; it’s just that it was already there and has not left. “We almost didn’t realize we had remained.” This “remaining” is everything, and it is “the only thing we have done,” says Sister Letizia, a Clarissan nun in Bouar. “This is what the Lord does: He re-

mains with us. This is what makes it possible to live in peace in a situation that in and of itself makes one want to cry.” Other than the non-governmental organizations, almost only the Catholic religious have remained. Parishes, convents, and missions have become refugee camps just like Carmel. During the day, the men try to re-enter the districts and villages, but flee back to the camp. Today, the threat of the anti-*balaka* continues to be responsible for more deaths and has also catalyzed the exodus of Muslims, who have left for the border in packed coaches. “Even our dearest friends have fled,” says Father Federico. “It consoles me to know that thousands of Muslims have found refuge in the presence of the Church spread throughout the country, saving their lives.” In Carmel, the number of “guests” has grown in line with the intensity of the conflict. The hours of the

day are filled by faces, plants, bags of maize, mud, and pain relievers. Every day, no matter what happens, there is Mass, “in the cathedral of palm trees and sky.” The Blessed Sacrament makes its way through the refugee camp. “It

**The crisis began on March 24<sup>th</sup>, when the coup by Michel Djotodia destroyed the life of the nation.**

is a surreal procession. But I walk on and in my heart I thank this people which forces us to live the Gospel.”

One day, the shooting is closer than usual and Father Federico wonders whether he should continue the celebration. Then he looks at the composed

assembly. At every gun shot there is a collective gasp, but no one moves. “I think: the Eucharist is our only salvation. Meanwhile, I see crowds of terrified people arriving with bags on their heads. What a challenge the defenseless Eucharist is in the midst of war!” At the end of Mass, we look around us: the number of people has tripled. “Initially, we were at a loss about >>

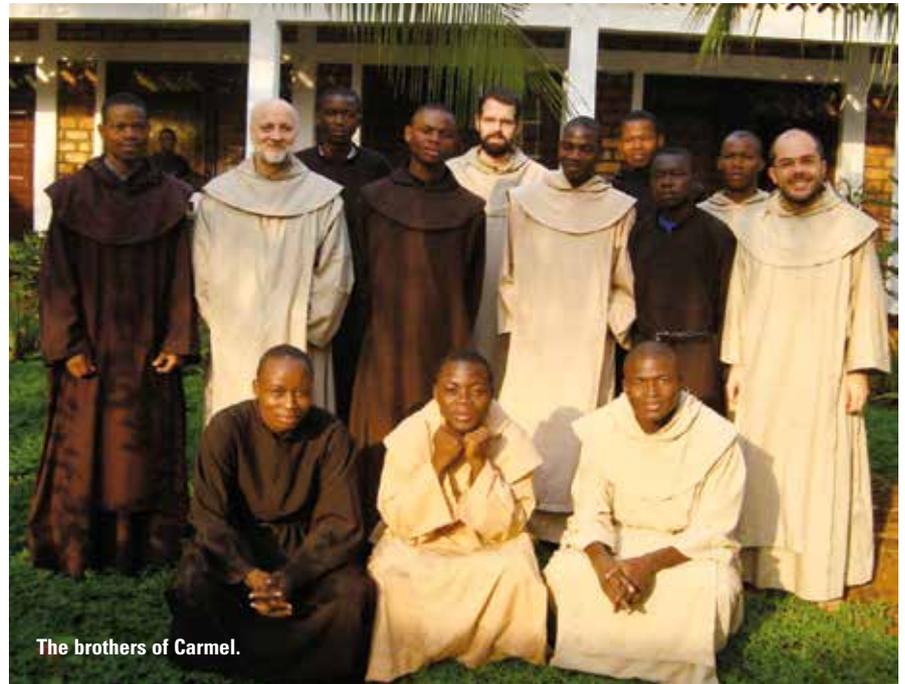
» what to do. But then we thought back to what we have lived up until now and the miracle of the multiplication of bread. And we began again.”

**FELIX AND LÉONCE.** The courtyard, houses, and church are no longer enough. The brothers open another wing of the convent, the workshop, and garage, moving tractors and trailers out of the way. The refectory is turned into a dormitory, a parlor is turned into a surgery, and another room is used for food storage, while the chapter room is used for the sick being kept under observation. The dining room is moved to the corridor of the cells, and the brothers meet when and where they can, “even just to ask one another forgiveness as, with the tension, there can be misunderstandings.”

For Father Trinchero, the certainty of these months comes above all through the hearts of his brothers, who have given themselves with patience and without any hesitation. “Every day, I am moved by their docility”—he says this for all of the work that he sees and for that which he doesn’t see (but that he finds already done by unknown helpers). He is also moved by the constant presence of Father Matteo and Father Mesmin and by the dedication of the novices and aspirants: Felix, who is by now an excellent nurse; Jeannot, Martial, and Salvador, who work with the refugees; Rodrigue, Christo, and Michael, who look after the water, electricity, and food; Benjamin, who busies himself with the collection of rubbish; and Léonce, the youngest, who doesn’t even remove his boots to eat. Léonce cleans and disinfects the facility; he is a Rwandan, born in a refugee camp in Congo when his family fled the genocide.

The team from the Dutch organization *Médecins sans Frontières* that pays a visit to Carmel is shocked: “We

**About 30 babies have been born in the courtyards, where today there are around 7,500 guests.**



cannot do anything more than what you are already doing.” About 30 babies have been born in the courtyards, where today there are around 7,500 guests. Forty percent of them are under 15 years of age. The brothers have started a temporary school, because the official ones are almost all still closed. “To prevent education is to truly kill,” says Father Federico.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council has decided to send a new peace-keeping envoy of 12,000 men.

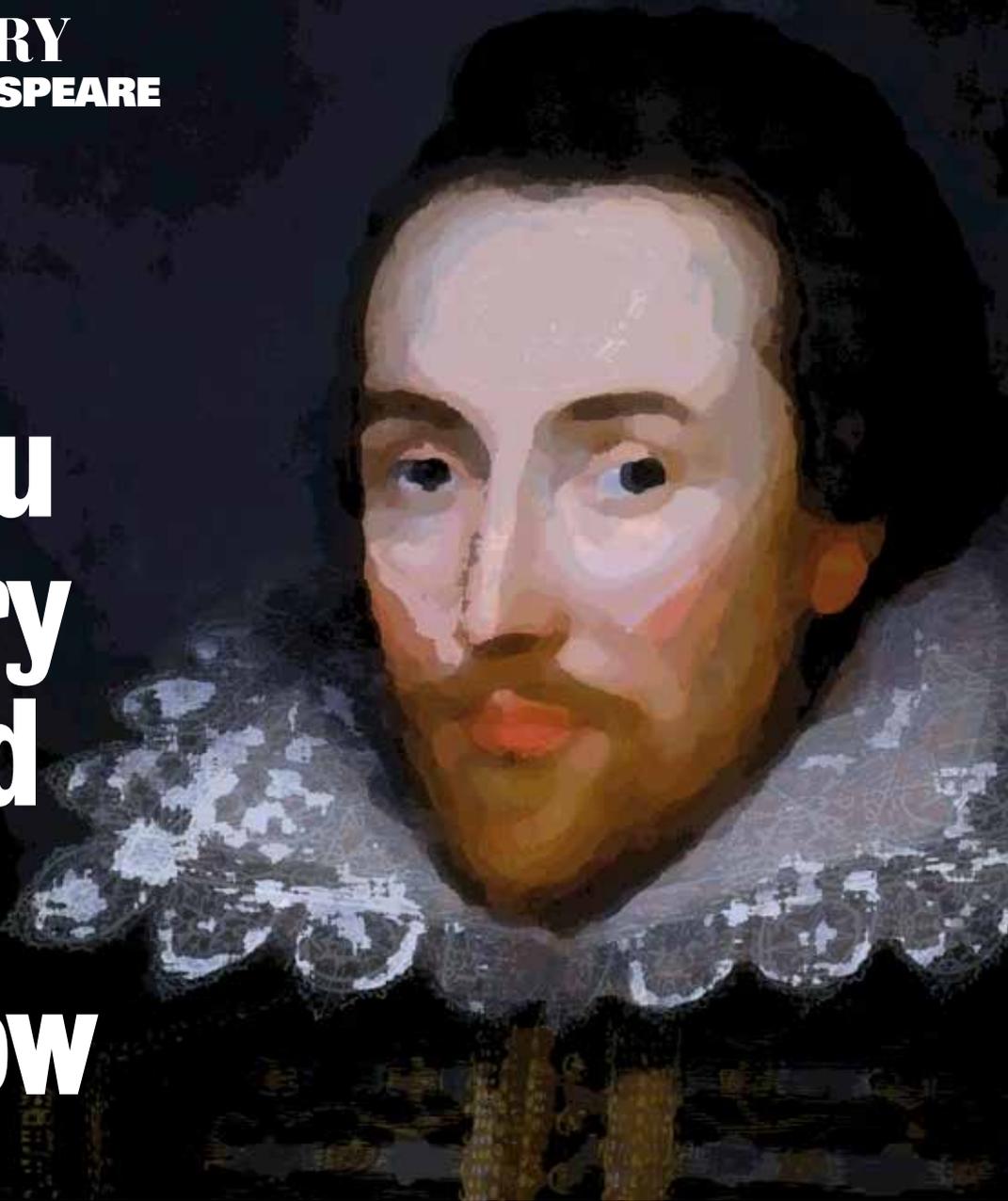
“The French have been here for months but we don’t know what they are doing. When something happens, they intervene, but always too late.” They had promised disarmament, yet, in the hot spot, “the 5km,” no one enters and no one exits. Everyone says it is full of weapons. In many districts, there is still shooting, and on Holy Thursday a Catholic priest was killed.

Not knowing how long the conflict will last put the brothers in front of a choice. “There were four possibilities:

1) send everyone home; 2) depart and leave the convent to the refugees; 3) wait until it all ends; 4) be brothers in a convent with a refugee camp beside it.” The first two options were never really taken into consideration, and only contemplated in moments of fatigue. The third was rejected, because “you cannot put off the crazy desire of our vocation.” The fourth was voted unanimously. They returned to pray the Hours as foreseen in the Rule: “Our guests understand that this is the heart of our life and do not disturb us.” They have rediscovered their own space by building a new one outside; they don’t go to sleep fully dressed anymore, although they are always ready to get up. And the six students have returned to their Philosophy and Theology lessons without taking any time from the work, the tractor ploughing, and the distribution of rice and beans.

Now that the rainy season is about to begin, it will make everything more difficult. “But the Lord will save us. We experience Him continuously.” Silence. “We are still alive. And then He gives us a great gift: we can live and suffer with them.” **I**

# And You in Every Blessed Shape We Know



**The great dramatist was born in 1564. From his best known works to his sonnets, what is the tension that permeates his texts and makes his work so relevant today?**

**The drama of man is always the drama of man's conscience: not only does he seek meaning but he needs it. Then it arrives and turns everything upside down.**

BY FABRIZIO SINISI

**I**f, on the one hand, what many Shakespearian academics say is true, that “there are no heroes, only men” in Shakespeare, then it is also true that man only exists in Shakespeare in so far as he constitutes a question about man. In Shakespeare, man *is*, in so much as he bears the drama of this inescapable question within: What is man? What am I? His greatest characters embody precisely this question; indeed, they per-

sonify it: Shakespearian man undertakes the inexhaustible quest to discover the “I.”

This “I” finds itself not as the subject of reflection, but as a place for a relationship: “...for the eye sees not itself, But by reflection” (*Julius Caesar*). It is in a relationship with another that the “I” discovers him or her self—in an untiring openness to something new. In such an openness, a king—who has always had everything without >>

» any effort—while dancing with a woman may exclaim: “O beauty, Till now I never knew thee!” (*King Henry VIII*). It is an openness that makes Antipholus, in *The Comedy of Errors*, declare his only certainty in a sea of confusion: “It is thyself, mine own self’s better part, Mine eye’s clear eye, my dear heart’s dearer heart, My food, my fortune and my sweet hope’s aim,” and that has Florizel, in *The Winter’s Tale*, say, “For I cannot be Mine own, nor any thing to any, if I be not thine. To this I am most constant.”

**WITHOUT DESIRE THERE IS NO PERSON.**

We find the same openness expressed in the *Sonnets*, which were all addressed to a beloved “You” to such an extent that beyond that relationship no other full conception of self exists; there is no understanding of one’s own stature: “But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive, and, constant stars, in them I read such art as truth and beauty shall together thrive, if from thyself to store thou wouldst convert; or else of thee this I prognosticate: Thy end is truth’s and beauty’s doom and date”; “Upon thy side against myself I’ll fight,” and in a dialogue that is so profound that it makes a man claim, “And you in every blessed shape we know.”

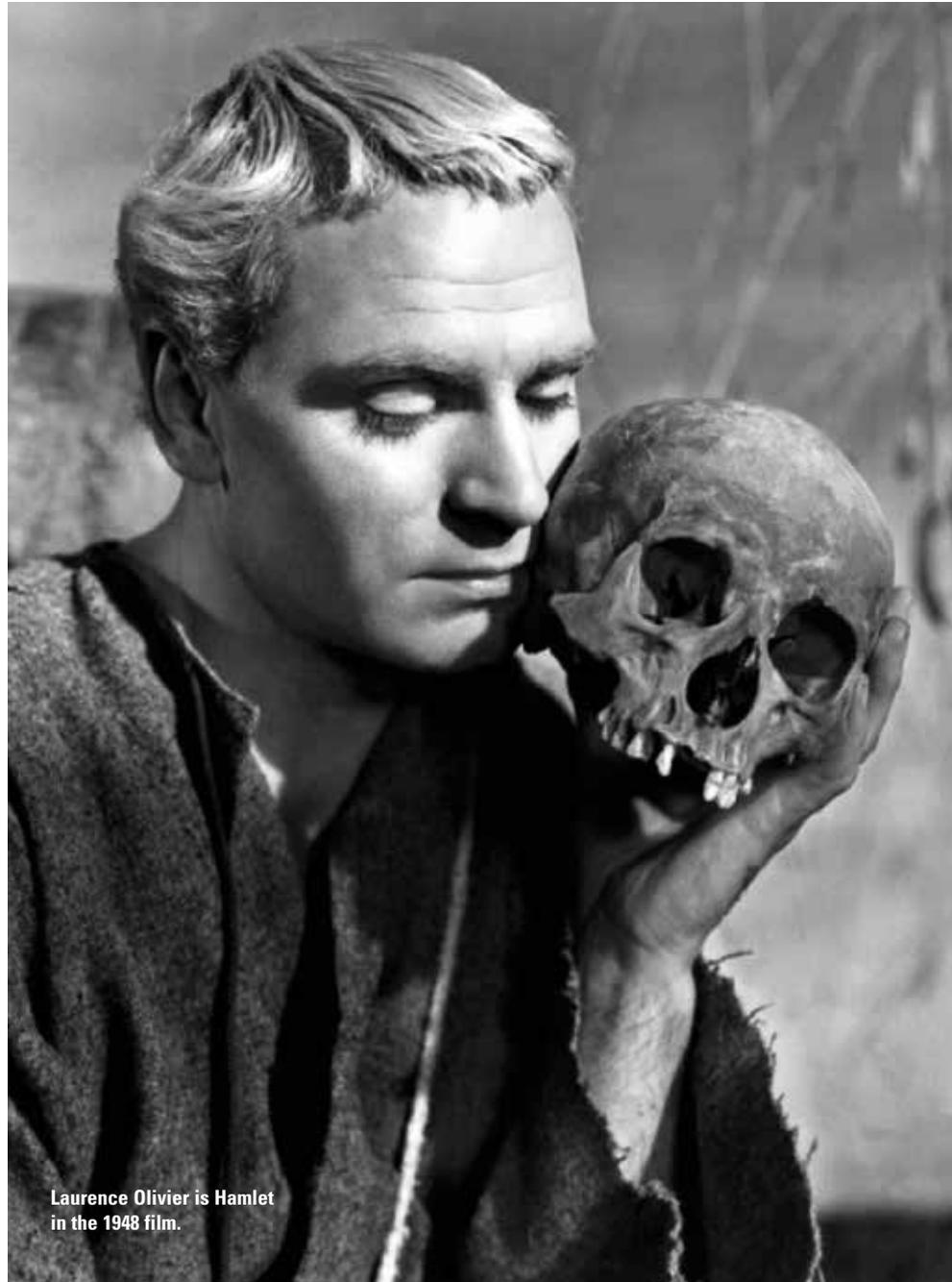
The story of a man is always the story of a desire: there is not a single work of Shakespeare that does not support this supposition. Even the unstoppable thirst for power that brings about the ruin of many of his characters is a sign of a discomfort in remaining still, of a perennial dissatisfaction with abiding by the boundaries of one’s own starting point. Shakespeare reveals not only the greatness of this restlessness to us but, above all, its perversions. We only need to con-

**“What power is it which mounts my love so high, that makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?”**

sider Richard III, born lame and deformed, who, through his very shortcomings, discovers a hunger: an unrestrained and evil hunger, but a hunger nevertheless that presents itself in the form of a dramatic desire. Here, the word “dramatic” must, above all, be understood as also comprising the theatrical sense of “action”—for Shakespeare, the human drama coincides with its scenic equivalent on the stage, one that does not disclose itself through a series of conceptual explanations but through the awak-

ening of relationships, through an act of freedom. Richard is never definitively compromised; instead, from time to time, he has to make a choice.

**DIVIDING POWER.** Ambition, for Shakespeare, is nothing other than an aspect of desire. It is not a defect in itself but the introduction of a space. The tragic ambitious Shakespearean characters are not evil because they desired greatness, but because they subjected themselves to an inadequate measure to obtain it—they misunderstood the nature of their own desire. Indeed, Richard will state: “I shall despair. There is no creature loves me; and if I die, no soul shall pity me: Nay,



Laurence Olivier is Hamlet in the 1948 film.



*Anonymus*, a film from 2011  
directed by Roland Emmerich.

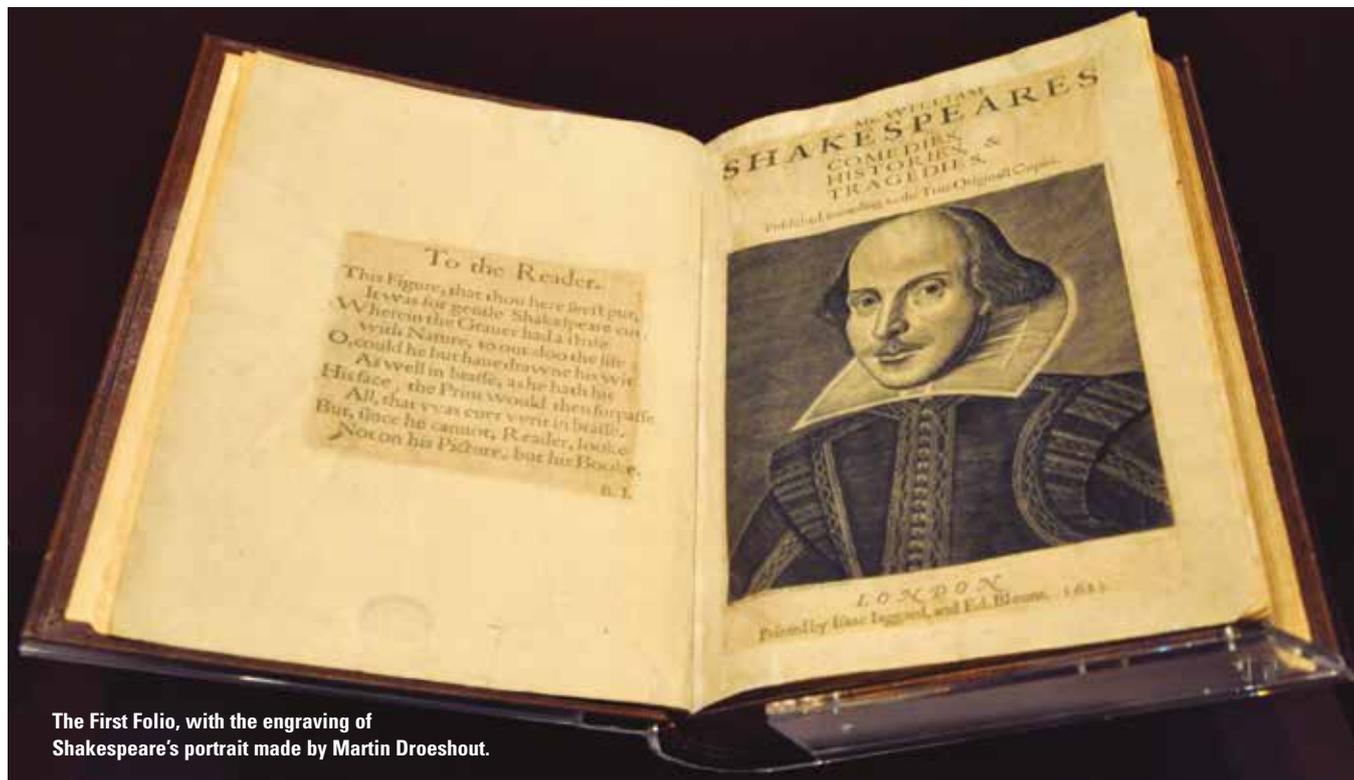
wherefore should they, since that I myself find in myself no pity to myself?" If, on the one hand, the misunderstood desire always falls back on itself—"Nought's had, all's spent, where our desire is got without content." (*Macbeth*)—desire, on the other hand, correctly understood can blossom into a question and a hope that far exceed one's own feelings: "What power is it which mounts my love so high, that makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye? ...Impossible be strange attempts to those that weigh their pains in sense and do suppose what hath been cannot be" (*All's Well That Ends Well*).

Where man consists in a desire that

reveals itself in the relationship with an other, power always endeavours to separate man from his desire, to separate the individual from the general, as with Brutus and Caesar: "...for my part, I know no personal cause to spurn at him, but for the general.... O, that we then could come by Caesar's spirit, and not dismember Caesar! But, alas, Caesar must bleed for it!" (*Julius Caesar*). And here is what power does to *Othello*: "But there, where I have garner'd up my heart, Where either I must live, or bear no life; the

**"Impossible be  
strange attempts to  
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suppose what hath  
been cannot be."**

fountain from the which my current runs, Or else dries up." In a word, where "There is scarce truth enough alive to make societies secure" (*Measure for Measure*) and where confusion has turned "That would make good of bad" (*Macbeth*), thus there is no greater error than to entrust one's own salvation to the fates of the world—an error that the Shakespearian characters denounce in a poem reminiscent of the Psalms: "O momentary grace of mortal men, Which we more hunt for than the >>>



The First Folio, with the engraving of Shakespeare's portrait made by Martin Droeshout.

» grace of God! Who builds his hopes in air of your good looks, lives like a drunken sailor on a mast, ready, with every nod, to tumble down into the fatal bowels of the deep” (*Richard III*).

**A RADICAL IDEA.** In this world of unassailable logic, only a totally gratuitous gaze can break up and scatter the cards. In *Measure for Measure*, Isabella reminds us of this when she seeks to crack the inhuman severity of Angelo the judge: “No ceremony that to great ones longs, not the king’s crown, nor the deputed sword, the marshal’s truncheon, nor the judge’s robe, become them with one half so good a grace as mercy does. ... Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once; and he that might the vantage best have took found out the remedy. How would you be, if He, which is the top of judgment, should but judge you as you are? O, think on that; and mercy then will breathe within your lips, like man new made.”

The link between each gesture.

Shakespearean drama is always about knowledge: man does not just want, but he needs to know the link that ties each gesture with the meaning of the whole. Each act reveals a radical underlying idea. One goes from the bitterness of Antonio who, in the *Merchant of Venice*, states that the world is “A stage where every man must play a part;” to the desperation of Cleopatra: “there is nothing left” (*Anthony and Cleopatra*); from the Fool that sustains that “Truth’s a dog must to kennel” (*King Lear*); to the question by which Alonso, in *The Tempest*, notes that “some oracle Must rectify our knowledge;” and finally to the most tremendous nihilist statement in European literature, pronounced in the fifth act of *Macbeth*: “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

**“No hope that way is another way so high a hope that even ambition cannot pierce a wink beyond.”**

Signifying nothing.” Everywhere in Shakespeare one can hear the loud cry for meaning that breaks forth and illuminates life’s choices. Yet even in despair a question lurks that almost no one has the courage to ask: “What

great hope have you! No hope that way is another way so high a hope that even ambition cannot pierce a wink beyond, but doubt discovery there” (*The Tempest*). “What a piece of work is a man!” exclaims Hamlet—and yet not even this is enough. “We

know what we are, but know not what we may be,” Ophelia claims, bearing witness to the tension that permeates each Shakespearean text and ensures it is still relevant today—the perception that man lives and consists in a dramatic and vertiginous relationship with his destiny. It is a drama that is not the sign of censoring something but of a link, of an indissoluble reciprocity. **I**



## THE STORY

### “WHO AM I?”

She entered the office and there it was: a surprise. By now, Doris received one of these every day, sometimes even more frequently. Usually, they were handwritten letters or notes on notebook paper, such as are used in school. Her students had been giving these notes to her for a couple of weeks, almost always after the morning meeting, those ten minutes with all of the classes assembled before lessons. We have started the school day forever like this at “Volta,” the Italian school in Bogotá, Colombia: reading an excerpt from a book or a sentence and entertaining some questions... But lately something new is happening. “I had questions that burned inside of me,” recalls Doris, who is the coordinator of the middle school at Volta. These questions were opened by the wounds of life, especially from her sister’s illness and death after months of suffering. “It has been a powerful call to the essential.” Then a dear friend left to return to Italy... and more.

So Doris’ questions had become the same questions that she was posing to the students in the morning: “What is the point of coming to school? Who am I? What do I really want?” They were not new words; who knows how many times they had been used even with the students, but now they were her words. The students were obviously struck, because, little by little, they began writing to her—to tell her about themselves, to tell her how those strange questions were true. Such questions might come out in a misunderstanding with one’s mother—“We fight, but I find myself wondering: Is this anger all that she is? And I?,” one questions in a letter to Doris. Another student found himself reprimanded by the school custodian: “The other day, she scolded me because I was throwing paper and I thought: Am I really this stupid?”

**Maria didn’t write; instead, she decided to show up directly in Doris’s office,** saying, “I wanted to tell you something.” She talks to her about struggles with a teacher and with the subject she teaches; formulas and rules that she really can’t digest. The barely passing grades... “Then, the other day, something happened. She returned my exam, marked as ‘satisfactory.’ I deserved better than that.” Instinctively, this would have been another opportunity to withdraw. “Instead, I started wondering: Who am I? Am I just this grade or something more? I started thinking of some adjectives to describe myself, but I didn’t know exactly what to say.” “And then?” “The same question came to me about her, about my teacher. And I thought of some adjectives to describe her: angry, strict but good at explaining...” One word at a time, the list grew, Maria recalls. “But the more I added, the more I realized they weren’t enough, because she is much more than that.”

**Doris listens, with her mouth open, astonished once again,** like she was when faced with those letters. These students have the same questions as she does, the same heart, the same journey of reawakening; an encounter with something real. “Do you know what happened since that moment, Doris?” “No, Maria. What?” “Now I love that teacher. And, just a little bit, I love her subject.” Pause. “And I love myself too.”





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