

TRACES

litterae communionis

Communion and Liberation
International Magazine

Vol. 27
October 2023

05

The path of young people



TRACES

Communion and Liberation International Magazine
Vol. 26

Editor (Direttore responsabile)
Alessandra Stoppa

Editorial Assistant
Anna Leonardi

Art director
Dario Curatolo

Layout
Lorenzo Penna

Editorial office
Via De Notaris, 50 - 20128 Milano
Tel. 02.92945400 - Fax 02.92945401

E-mail: traces@traces-cl.com
Web: english.clonline.org

Publisher (Editore)
Editrice Nuovo Mondo srl
Iscrizione nel Registro degli Operatori di Comunicazione
n. 26972

Cover
Photos by Rebecca Sanmarco

n° 05

October 2023



Rome, Italy. The photos in this issue are taken from the first days of the academic year in La Sapienza University.

- 01** *Editorial*
- 02** *Letters*
- 04** *Close-up*
The verification of faith
- 14** *Erasmus. Without any project,*
encountering the world
- 20** *I, a Muslim, thirst for their happiness*

GIUSSANI

100

1922 - 2022
ANNIVERSARY
OF BIRTH

GIUS
SANI
100

DOWNLOAD
THE APP
OF THE
EXHIBITION

mostra.luigigiussani.org

The test

“**F**aith makes me conceive and mobilize my relationship with the things that interest me in a different way, and so a different experience of humanity is created, and this is the test of faith.” Giussani spoke thus to the Movement's university students during an Equipe in 1981. In this issue, we collect the stories of today's university students from various parts of the world, together with some passages taken from the assembly and the summary at this year's CLU Equipe, which brought together 450 young people at the end of the summer to address that very topic: “The verification of faith.”

The university academic year has resumed and here you will find out from where these young people restart: from what interests them, from what is left of the past summer, from the whole journey of the past year, from events at the university, in the death of a friend, in welcoming freshmen, in disappointment or anxiety. And in the beauty of accompanying each other to understand the origin of the experience they live, even spending a period of study abroad without their usual network, driven to verify what sustains life. This is how Riccardo spoke of his months in cold Gothenburg and Andrea of the encounters that changed him in Brussels. Yersultan, a Kazakh and Muslim history student, talks about his meeting with the young people of the CLU: “I was interested in their way of life, so intense, so open, so in love with life. I would have liked to steal their eyes and keep them forever with me. I thirsted for their happiness.”

In the 1981 Equipe, Giussani added: “The heart of the matter lies in the fact that we all say: ‘Christ,’ but it is as if this Christ did not exist; because Christ is the answer, he is the sense, Christ is the form, he is the meaning of living,” and he listed the very concrete manifestations of this living: affective relationships; the use of things; the way of looking at nature, time, space, study; the relationship with your mother and father; your plans for the future; your past...

A student in the assembly with Davide Prospero that opens this issue spoke of a friend who has recently joined the Movement and who approached him at the end of their community holiday and said, “What amazes me most is that you do not stop at saying that ‘Christ exists’; I do that too, but you seek Him.” What did he see?

Lali, Francesca, Francesco

edited by
Paola Bergamini
pberga@tracce.it

Discovering the meaning of war

We are publishing this witness from the International Assembly of Responsibles of a friend from the Ukrainian community who presently lives in Italy.

First of all, I would like to thank everyone who is helping us Ukrainians, those who accompany us and who look at us without averting their gaze. We come to know reality through experience. Today mine is the war in Ukraine, my country, from which I have escaped. And this question arises in me: how do I give witness to an experience that cannot be compared to anything else, so that it is not reduced to a theory, to a hope for commiseration? Experience entails the discovery of the meaning of an object that we know. For me, this means understanding the meaning of the war in the truest sense of this word. I begin from those points with which Fr. Giussani defines experience: 1) an encounter with a reality outside of yourself. For me, this reality is the impact I have felt from the war, being hurled from my everyday life, but also encountering an experience of friendship, of a common path. How does this objective fact relate to the Movement and to the community?; 2) to understand the meaning and value of this experience. Is it possible to discover value and meaning even in war? For me, this search is the answer to the question about whether I can stay awake in front of the pain of another, like the apostles when Christ asked them to keep watch with Him. It is the grace of faith; and 3) a personal, critical verification, which is a continuous work of putting reality in relationship to the demands of my heart so I can find the correspondence between the meaning of my experience and the event that I run up against. What does the war have to do with my community? In

what I have already lived, how can I recognize aspects of reality that are not directly accessible to me and that often pertain to vitally important questions; in other words, why do we have need of witnesses? I am so moved by the phenomenon of witness. I am a witness of faith, of Christ Crucified and of Christ Resurrected, and at the same time, of the experience of a human path that has been given to me to walk. I did not choose to be a witness to the experience of being a widow or of being a refugee, and even less so a witness to war. But each day, what prevails in my heart is faith, hope, and an awareness that Christ is with me in this storm. I witness to and carry within me this experience. This has to do with my heart, with my affection for Christ. But it also has to do with the fact that witnessing to this becomes ever more difficult in light of the suffering of the other. I feel that the experience that I witness to is too heavy. I feel like the leper who is prohibited from entering the city, but who Christ goes out to console. I think that the fascination of an encounter with Christ by itself would not have been enough for the apostles to have followed Him. I am certain that what allowed them to leave everything and follow Him was how Christ looked upon their humanity, how He embraced their pain, their errors. He was a presence in front of the need and the mystery of the other. I continue my path in the Movement only because Christ has called me through friends whose actions embody Fr. Giussani. I am here in Italy without my family, who escaped to Holland, because of Fr. Giussani, who taught me to stay in front of the beauty, dignity, pain, and otherness of the other. I follow him because he has awakened an active faith, he has given the impetus for the founding of unique social centers that respond to concrete needs. I need for the words about our being one body not to become a theory, but a practice. I desire that the Movement become the crevice that the rock climber looks for when he climbs a mountain, that he can grab, that allows him to pass where it seemed impossible.

Lali

So many people changed by charitable work

Fifteen years ago, we began bringing food packages to Anna and Mauro as a charitable work. For a long time, they would close the door in our faces. Then they allowed us into their lives and their wounds: two deceased children and an existence full of pain and struggle, psychological problems and legal issues. The first years were dominated by their desperation and our incapacity to stay beside them. Everything we tried to do was like a grain of sand in an ocean of pain. With time, a friendship was born, a mutual companionship for life: they would call us and would wait outside their door to make sure we came in. We would witness arguments or complaints about how hard and horrible life was, but then we'd end up laughing and hugging each other. From this friendship born out of a charitable work, one of us began to discern her vocation in an order of nuns that puts charity front and center. After this gesture, each time I returned home, I looked at my husband and three children in a different way. I always ask myself why I go to another part of the city every Saturday morning, and I always reach the same answer: "Lord, I need You to show Yourself to them and to me." I always end up gaining more than they do; it is a simple and gratuitous gesture that gives more to me than to them. In time and with help from the Food Bank, we also began to help their son, who has psychological issues and problems with drugs, to the point of also involving my husband, who helps them with legal issues. This spring, Mauro died. Together with me at the funeral was my friend who always came with me to visit this family, and Laura, whom I met a year ago and is my new companion in charitable work; she has been an unexpected gift for my life. We introduced ourselves to the son, but he told us he felt like he already knew us because of the stories his mom and dad had told over the years. There was an unexpected bond with the other two children as well. What dominated was not pain, but a companionship for life. We returned to the car arm in arm with Anna. Who would have thought fifteen years ago that we would have arrived at this point? In the following days, their daughter thanked us for the songs and for our friendship, and the story continues—Laura and I once again rang the doorbell and left a package and returned home with an even greater gift: Anna gave me her grandson's little bicycle. "I give it to you, but only if you keep it for your little boy, not for anyone else!"

Francesca, Milan (Italy)

The questions reopened on a vacation

In the last couple of years, since I started medical school, I've changed so much. In spite of a Catholic upbringing, I had almost completely distanced myself from the church: rarely going to Mass and zero prayers, and by the end of high school, I had stopped going to G.S. I only thought about girls, going out at night, getting drunk. But I was aware that within me there was a searching for something else. During the first year of med school, I began meeting some classmates who were in the Movement and who lived in a way that was completely different from mine. At first, I didn't want to have much to do with them, because I knew that they asked themselves too many questions. I thought to myself, "I want to live my life without thinking too much, I just want to have fun." But was I really having fun? Why did the people I had around me want to be with me? These new "friends" began inviting me to be with them and that was okay with me because I felt the need to change something. They always waited for me and insisted on searching me out. I came to realize that they were together because they wanted to be. When they asked each other, "How are you?" they actually wanted to know. They organized various kinds of activities so they could live life together and help each other. I had never encountered anything like that. So gradually, I drew closer to them and became part of the group in spite of my misgivings. But in one year, I went to the School of Community only a few times; I never shared anything and half the time I wasn't listening. At times, I didn't even understand the meaning of what people were saying. I registered at the last minute for the vacation last year because some friends convinced me that it was worth going. Again, they had waited for me. As a matter of fact, the vacation opened so many questions I hadn't wanted to answer; I had set them aside. During this past year, I've participated more. At the Exercises, I was part of the crew of ushers, and on the vacation I was the captain of the group that organized the games; I also helped with the day trips. This was one of the ways in which I felt waited for and preferred. I still feel waited for by everyone. I feel embraced and, as it says in *The Religious Sense*, everything around me begins to take on meaning. It's evident that my heart is waiting for something to give meaning to everything that surrounds me—only in this way can I begin to be myself. Sometimes I still ask myself if this environment is for me. Everything is going well and I am changing, but will I ever succeed in being truly myself? The question remains open.

Francesco, Milan (Italy)

Close-up

© Rebecca Sammarco



The verification of faith

Excerpts from the Assembly with **Davide Prospero** at the Equipe of university students in CL. At the end of the summer, 450 students gathered in La Thuile, Italy (August 30th to September 1st).

Contribution. *The title for this gathering includes the line: “The verification of faith serves to make us ever more certain that Christ is truly the answer for our entire life.” The content of this line was confirmed for me by our CLU vacation, in particular the final evening. During those beautiful, full days I came to understand what the leader before me had said in proposing that I take over: “A leader is not the first who makes others follow him or her, but the first who follows.” On the last evening of the vacation, word reached us that a friend of ours had died, and I had an hour of total emptiness in which I had no idea what to do. This happened just before the final party. I was amazed to observe myself in action and see that the only thing I could do in that moment was follow those in front of me, our friends who organized the evenings and an adult who accompanies us. I didn’t know how to behave, but with them it was astounding to recognize that I was asked to follow those I had in front of me. In particular, I was impressed by two people who were the*

first to tell me, “We have encountered something so beautiful during these days that for us it would be a loss not to do anything.” Everything we propose, from the parties and skits to the games and the Masses and the gatherings—everything deep down is done so I can acknowledge Christ in my life. This astonished me because the awareness exhibited by these two friends came exclusively from what they had seen in those days, not because they had read it in some text. That evening we decided to sing together and then pray the Rosary. I was amazed by the silence entering and leaving the hall, a silence not heard among us before. We were not silent out of duty or because somebody told us to be—it was a silence full of a prayer of entreaty to Someone who saves our life. At least it was this way for me—a prayer to Someone to save my life in that moment, to take me and love me. Afterwards, two other leaders and I had to write the summary and the “evening group” had to prepare skits. Some of them didn’t feel up to doing it, but we talked about it



and decided to take the step of betting on what we had seen. The same reason that motivated us to write the summary also motivated the “evening group” to do the skits, and they turned out to be the best skits I’d seen since I’ve been in the Movement. I’ll tell you about one last thing. A guy who met us a short while ago came to me that evening and told me about a

few things, and then said, “What most amazes me is that you don’t stop at saying ‘Christ exists,’ which is what I do, but you really seek Him.” With this simplicity he hit the nail on the head. Doing something that evening wasn’t an “answer” or something else: it was the truest attempt for me to seek Christ. It is necessary for me to reach the judgment that

that evening, if Christ had not been in our midst, I would have been lost. What happened that evening was the greatest comparison to my own experience that I bring with me.

Davide Proserpi. I’d just like to reflect on a few of the things you said, to look at them more deeply, because sometimes we say things that are enormous but I don’t know whether we actually realize it. This is the demonstration that there’s something much greater among us that sets us on a journey and makes us glimpse a truth that time will help us to understand just how deep it is, and how capable of supporting our whole life. What he said makes us see something important: while they were on holiday, something happened that was like an earthquake for them and others, but this fact in itself does not hold the answer to the question that the heart cries out for, or to the bewilderment one feels when faced with the death of a friend. In itself it does not hold the answer to this. The verification of faith begins when we are going

“We cannot carry on as if the cry for meaning born in us could be silenced. We need to bet on what we had seen, and we begin to experience that life has a direction.”

through a certain type of experience—for him it was the vacation, but really, our whole life is inside the event that seized us—and this verification consists of the fact that the question cannot be ignored. We cannot carry on doing what we were doing as if nothing had happened, as if the cry for meaning born in us could be silenced. This cry for meaning orients everything, the need that what we do make more sense, and not only this, but that it have a meaning, a connection with what in our heart does not find justification, an answer, or peace. So, what he said is beautiful: “The only thing I could do in that moment was follow those in front of me.” Then he used a phrase that for me truly has to do with the verification of faith; he spoke of “betting on what we had seen,” because following means betting. It really is so! When you trust someone, you wager. You don’t know yet; you’re not already sure what you’ll bring home. There is a level of risking yourself that is indispensable for faith to grow.

Isn’t this the case, for example, in affective relationships? It’s a matter of risking yourself, entrusting yourself to a person you can’t control, who is not you. In fact, often the difficulty in relationships grows when you begin to feel the need to control the other person in everything, when you begin to dominate the person. Instead, this betting, this putting your own life behind another, begins a different adventure during which, even in the midst of pain and at times an apparent lack of sense, you begin to experience a meaning, a direction, that life has a direction, and so you begin to ask and to pray, and life fills with this prayer of entreaty, which frees us.

Fr. Francesco Ferrari. I’d like to remark on something, too. In his words, you see the beauty and victory of entering into reality in the light of the encounter. That evening could have gone many ways. Normally, people react to the death of a friend by escaping, not wanting to think, cursing God. This is the way people usually respond to the drama of reality! Instead, that evening the encounter he’d had was not a “name glued onto” reality; rather, it was what enabled him to enter into reality. Living in the light of the encounter does not mean running away from reality, but living it in a different way. We have to be able to recognize the features of this difference; for example, the fact that in front of a death they could stay together and sing.

Prosperi. Yes, and I’d add something important about the question of faith. We think faith is the point we reach after a series of deductions based on things that happen, such that at a certain point we reach certainty. Unfortunately, it doesn’t work that way. It’s not like a mathematical equation or an algorithm to be solved. Something else has to happen, something we don’t produce. A grace has to happen, and for this reason freedom is seen in asking; we have to ask for this grace! What consolation would there have been in spending the evening doing skits, songs, and all the rest, if it were not to affirm the unity of life, to affirm that life still has meaning? Yes, maybe for a little while, but what consolation would there have been if those things were not done to affirm that there is eternal life, that what began here does not end here, that our dead friend continues to be present and alive in my life, continues to be with me? I began to learn this as a child because my mother

said these things to me when I lost my father. This is how faith begins, only if someone says to you, “There is eternal life.” Yes, this is a consolation. But how can you reach this consolation by your own strength? You can’t. It is far beyond your abilities. You have to wager on this—that “there is eternal life.” The verification of this affirmation, that which causes faith to grow over time; that is, the certainty that it really is so, that life does not end here (Gandalf would have said “white shores”—J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* in *The Lord of the Rings*), that life doesn’t end this way, is the fact that within the journey of this companionship we experience how this answer makes life full, fuller, and excludes nothing. And if nothing is excluded, not even death can exclude anything. But I have to experience this fullness of life, I have to experience that eternity is something real. So, the question we bring to the Mystery who makes all things must be also the question we ask each other. The more dramatic life is, the more we must demand that our companionship be true in everything, no shortcuts.

Contribution. *I wagered on a person who betrayed me terribly, and the question that arose in me was, “Why can I continue to say yes to the Movement now, to being here, to the responsibility asked of me in my community?” If it consisted only of my encounter with that person, I wouldn’t be here today—it was a betrayal I can’t just gloss over; I can’t pretend it didn’t happen. The more I look at that pain, the more I can’t deny that the steps I’ve taken, even through the actions of that person, made me who I am. I can’t deny what has happened in these years that led me to be myself. There is something beyond that person and beyond my friends. I need friends to walk with but they’re not the answer for me. I came here and I say yes to the Movement, to my community, to what is asked of me, because I need to see that “more” that calls me. I can’t ignore this question. And here at this gathering I’ve seen evidence of that “more” again.*

Prosperi. Thank you. What you say is very true. We need to understand just how true it really is. What you told us

and what, as you said, causes you to continue to be here even if you were betrayed (in fact, you were sorely betrayed), says two things. First, what you encountered through that person is true, and it is truer than his and our limitations, mean-spiritedness, or betrayals. Listen to what Fr. Giussani said (it’s a text I know you’ve already read): “I believe at least some of you have already heard me insist on the fact that you do not follow a person but an experience of life, which, to the extent that it is faithful to the education of the Church, is an experience of the Lord,” not just of that person. Through the person you have mentioned you began the adventure of following an experience, the experience of the Lord. Through an ephemeral point, which can even betray and hurt you (it’s an absurd paradox, absurd to the mind), something entered your life that set you before the face of the Lord. Fr. Giussani continued: “A person may have proposed it, but with the disappearance of this person (in the various ways a person can disappear, not only through death, but also through his or her defects, wrongs, or errors) the experience in its factors of value remains.” *Un avvenimento di vita cioè una storia* [An event of life, that is, a history], Edit-Il Sabato, Rome 1993, p. 335. This is all the more reason—precisely because of what you have said—your certainty grew as you followed that person and also others; that person may have been the beginning of everything for you. But all of us are here too, full of limitations; we may act more or less badly, but we may also act well, and sometimes we do so, thank goodness! Actually, we usually do more good than harm. Through this, you can continue to verify that initial experience. Why is this so crucial in our lives? Because like everyone, the disillusionment caused by these limitations may lead us to doubt the truth of what happened to us, and then to doubt God. Yet God chose this method, mysteriously: trusting yourself to a person, even knowing the human heart, our mean-spiritedness, wretchedness, and weakness (let’s call it this); often our mean-spiritedness is the fruit of a weakness that does not allow itself



© Rebecca Sammarco

to be educated, corrected, or influenced by the way the Lord continues to accompany us, that is, place us within a companionship. He chose this method as a chance of salvation for all of us. Just think, if you weren't sure that the Lord is the One guiding this companionship, even with all its limitations, it would be impossible to forgive! Instead, I can even come to forgive, precisely because I recognize that the other's limitations, no matter how painful, do not vanquish Christ's face, which continues to dominate in my life. The harm done to me is not stronger than the fullness of life that Christ brings me: it doesn't vanquish Christ! Certainly, we have to wager on this, first of all. Why do I continue to use this word? Because we'd like to have answers immediately that set things right and enable us to go forward with more certainty. But certain wounds can remain; in fact, do remain. Certain things don't find an answer right away that clarifies everything and puts everything in order. Our journey toward certainty is not a psychological journey; we don't have to put our psychology

in order so that we no longer suffer anxiety. Christ is not an anxiolytic! Our certainty is affective; that is, an attachment to a presence that, notwithstanding all our wounds, continues to move our life, to be the source of fascination, attraction, goodness, and hope, day by day. Thank you.

Contribution. *For me, the verification of faith corresponds to the promise of victory over death that happened to me in encountering the Movement. My father died eight years ago. At the Meeting, talking with an ill friend of my father's, whom I didn't know well, I rediscovered my father and all the woundedness I carry inside. However, this passes through the drama of my freedom; for eight years I had completely pushed aside the wound, and now, from the vacation onwards, it is as if reality has driven me to my knees. Actually, it's a very beautiful thing—I left the Meeting crying, not out of sadness that my father was gone but because I was moved by what had happened to me. How can we be close to each other as friends? I have friends whose parents are ill and I'm unable to be close to them, and I'm unable to be close to myself.*



Contribution. *Reflecting on the title of this gathering (“The Verification of Faith”), I think about my life and how everything has changed in the light of the encounter I had. Not everything yet, but many things. I think of school, because when I was in the fourth year of high school I wanted to drop out, but now I’m attending the university. I think of my relationship with my parents, which has become something incredible in these months. They got to know my friends and my mother said to me, “I don’t feel like going to happy hours anymore, because I return home and nothing remains. I need what I see at dinner with these friends of yours.” I think of my relationship with the girls: now I can say that we have a great relationship, which has never happened before. I always adopted the worst possible way of behaving. These are the things that I see blossoming, and I never could have imagined it. All these things passed through my efforts and also my screw-ups; they are not mistakes but, rather, an opportunity to cry out even more forcefully. In my relationship with my mother, which was not great, though I really wanted it to be, I’ve made lots of mistakes but also stupendous things have happened. The same goes for school with the girls. I see that everything is this way for me. I don’t know what this has to do with the fact that many girls commit suicide; this makes me feel so much pain, but the wager is no longer based on nothingness. It’s a bet based on facts that are pillars for me. I want to discover how it relates with everything, this desire for “totality” we’ve been talking about in these days.*

Prosperi. The friend who spoke before you said, “For eight years, I had completely pushed aside the wound.” It happened pretty early for you! In fact, often many more years pass, but sooner or later, life presents the bill, not only for the mistakes we make, but also for things that happen to us and aren’t our fault. But then? You asked, “How can we be close to each other as friends?” How can friends be close to each other, not reducing what each of them is, not pretending about anything? Certainly, they can’t substitute for the answer to the heart’s cry; not at all, because this only comes from the Mystery. But friends must help me, can help me to be faithful to the cry of the heart, above all when this cry does not echo in a void, but is an entreaty addressed to Someone. Friends can even help me to live my cry as a prayer of entreaty, a prayer to Someone, and thus as a journey, a journey

of knowledge, affection, and truth, so that we can say, “Christ has perturbed my life,” as one of you said. Why do I feel tenderness at this? Hearing you say these things sends chills up my spine! Why can you say “Christ”? Why, precisely, “Christ”? What do you know of Him? What perturbed your life was an encounter with some people, an adult, some friends, a young man, your parents; it was an encounter with a fact that shook you up. The thing that perturbed your life was a fact, facts, concrete people. And yet, in front of this, you dare to say “Christ.” Some would lynch you for this, would stone you for this, as if they had heard a blasphemy. Why isn’t it a blasphemy? Because the same thing happened two thousand years ago to John and Andrew, who encountered that man named Jesus. In front of them was a man who did things, said things, some of which they didn’t understand. Exceptional. He was an exceptional presence. Their reason could reach the point of saying, “He is an exceptional presence: He is extraordinary. He talks about me in a way nobody has ever spoken of me. He opened the eyes of a man born blind. He made a paralytic walk.” Then, at a certain point, He began saying and doing strange things; for example, forgiving sinners, and people asked Him, “Who are you?” At a certain point, they began to call that exceptional man named Jesus, “Christ.”

Do you understand what a leap it was to pass from saying “Jesus” to acknowledging that “you are the Christ, the Messiah”; that is, the One all people of all times have always awaited? You see an exceptional presence that corresponds to you, that corresponds deeply to the needs of your heart, but at the same time, while it corresponds to you, to some extent it also doesn’t correspond, doesn’t seem to correspond to you. Why? Because it shatters the image you had formulated of what the Messiah should be. The Messiah was to come and free the people of Israel from its oppressors, from the Romans, from other people, from the threats of their enemies. Instead, that man walked among the people, did things on the streets, and at a certain point began saying, “I free you from your sins.” Then they began to understand that initially this did not correspond to their image of Him, but over time it corresponded to what their heart truly desired. And then, yes, the criterion of the heart began to emerge in all its import, even more than they were initially aware of. In front of a presence, or to put it better, within the bond



that begins to be established with a presence, the heart can fully emerge for what it is, because the heart is not absolute. Actually, it is, but I experience its impact on life when it begins to bond with a presence in which things, reality, become clear. One of you said, "But all this coexists with the fear of not holding something back for myself." This is exactly what happened to Peter, who said yes to Jesus, and then Jesus asked a much greater thing of him. It's good that Jesus asked this precisely of Peter, because, yes, Peter had betrayed Him. We're this way as well. Not only do we betray, but we understand and we don't understand. The one time Peter said something

that Jesus valorized was when he said, "You are the Christ," and Jesus answered, "Blessed are you, and not because you said the right thing [at times we'd like to be this way: we get up and speak in order to say the right thing]. Blessed are you because you believed what another person told you, that is, what I've told you." The Holy Spirit reveals the truth, the deep truth of Christ. "It is the Spirit who prompted this in you. Blessed are you for this, because you believed this, trusted this. It did not come from you." All the other times Peter intervened, Jesus corrected him (at least, in the episodes reported in the Gospels). But Peter continued to say yes because that presence dominat-

ed over everything else, even over his sinfulness. Peter was humiliated, and that humiliation (at the fact that three times Jesus asked whether Peter loved Him, and the third time He even lowered Himself to Peter's level in order to bring Peter to His) became the source of the humility that is the necessary condition for leading the Church, for following Christ: "Without You I can do nothing." Christ entrusted His Church to Peter precisely because of his acknowledgment that "without You I can do nothing."

Allow me to make an observation. I believe there is a final temptation, including in reference to

“A father is someone who introduces you to reality. We are introduced to a positive relationship with reality, not because someone explains it to us, but through a relationship with someone who continually generates us.”

the questions you’ve asked, to think that all we’ve said is a kind of initial push, but sooner or later we have to go forward alone, on our own legs. That moment will never come! I’ll always need this companionship, this presence that sustains life. But this is not belittling; it’s not something that lessens my stature. Rather, it’s the condition for my greatness!

I’ll say two final things quickly. Referring to what our friend said before, that you can’t live without a father, to some extent I’ve always experienced this. A father is someone who introduces you to reality. We are introduced to the meaning of reality, and thus to a positive relationship with reality, not because someone explains it to us, but through identifying with, through a relationship with someone who continually generates us. We all need a father to live. The method chosen by Jesus Himself to cause the modality of this relationship to endure throughout history for all people

to the end of time is interesting. This shows us what our task, our mission, is: to make Him known to all people. Jesus did not say, “I will always give you exceptional leaders, people whose genius will educate you the right way.” If this were the method, He would have stayed on earth. Who better than Jesus? Being God, He could do what He wanted, and so He could have remained physically present instead of ascending to heaven. Instead, He chose a different road and said, “It is through the unity among you, through your communion, through your being together for Me, because I am present among you and you acknowledge Me present among you, it is through this that the very event you were able to experience through My physical presence will be able to continue in history.” It is only through a human reality in which He remains present that this paternity guiding our life will continue to never be far from us, that it will always be possible, and that it will continually generate our life. ■

Erasmus

Without any project, encountering the world

© Jakob Dalbjörn/Unsplash



Riccardo was in Sweden for ten months.

He wondered how his experience in Italy would hold up in Scandinavia.

Here is his story and that of other university students who spent a period of study abroad.



Anna Leonardi

For ten months, from September to June, Riccardo lived in Gothenburg, Sweden for an Erasmus project to write his thesis. There is a key word in his story that he says with a smile: “failure.” One finds it hard to believe him, partly because of that smile that seems to say something else and partly because the research group he collaborated with is one of the most advanced in the field of artificial intelligence as applied to biology. In addition to his thesis on the design of new anti-cancer drugs, when he left Milan, Riccardo had other things on his mind. If his

“At a certain point we said to ourselves: ‘But in the face of this humanity that seems frozen, we live by using our hearts to seek and grasp what makes us happy. This is the first thing that we and others really need.’”

desire to move was mainly dictated by his scientific endeavors, inside he felt that the Erasmus project was an opportunity to come into contact with a world different from his own, the beauty of which he wanted to discover. “But above all, I wanted the experience I had with my friends from the CLU to be passed on there, to that small strip of the west coast of the Scandinavian peninsula, to the people I would become friends with,” he recounts.

But Riccardo had to come to terms with a reality that did not quite work out that way. In Gothenburg his days were suddenly emptied of all the things he used to do in Milan: the lunches with friends where they talked about life at the university, the organization of public events, the weekly School of Community—in short, the friendship that aimed at sharing everything that he had known before was lost. Everything was reduced to the essentials and he wondered how what he had experienced could hold up in such different circumstances. He made a few attempts: during lunches with his colleagues in the lab he tried to establish a dialogue, but they foundered at his initial questions. “They were friendly, but I could not really get to know them. My questions were seen as an encroachment. Whether I asked about their children or the problem of immigrants, there was always a safety net that did not allow us to go beyond the usual pleasantries.”

Every fifteen days, Riccardo had the opportunity to

connect with other Erasmus students for a School of Community together. Guiding them in their work was Fr. Francesco Ferrari, leader of the CL university students. “That was the fundamental moment for a change of outlook in the face of what I perceived as a failure of my expectations.” Many had the same problem as him, the same concern of failing to pierce the bubble of political correctness and indifference of the people they met. “At a certain point there was a turning point. We said to ourselves: ‘But in the face of this humanity that seems frozen, we live by using our hearts to seek and grasp what makes us happy. This is the first thing that we and others really need.’”

Riccardo remembers that Cecilia, on an Erasmus on the island of Madeira, had once said to everyone: “But what am I waiting for? For those around me to speak to me about Christ or for Christ to speak to me through those around me? The first one blocks me, but the second one relaunches me.” These dialogues, together with the reading of Fr. Giussani’s *The Religious Sense*, to which Riccardo dedicated the thirty-minute tram ride that took him to the university every morning, are what kept him from becoming flat. At a certain point he realized that, even if the circumstances did not change, even if Gothenburg was becoming darker and colder, something began to blossom within him. And one of the PhD students he worked with, Cyrus, saw this immediately. “After two

Riccardo, a physics student,
visiting a family of the
Movement in Lund, Sweden.



16

months there, he was the first person who was really interested in me. He started asking me questions about Italy, about my girlfriend who was studying in Germany and, when he realized that I was Catholic, about faith.” He also wanted to talk to him about himself, about the man he lives with and the need to feel loved and free. One morning, at dawn, Cyrus called Riccardo. He told him that he was on his way home because during the night his brother had attempted suicide. He was upset and full of questions that he could no longer silence now that he knew that Riccardo was there to share them with. “Of all people, he sought me out, the last to arrive. Not because I had the most convincing explanations, but because of the fullness he had seen fill my heart, which was as needy as his.”

The same thing happened with Lilly, the woman from whom he rented his room. “She was my second friend. At first, she was very strict about house rules. One of them was that we would have meals at different times. But I often could not resist and if she came in after me, I would leave her some pasta or risotto. In the end, she could not resist either and, whenever possible, we would have dinner together. If I then cleaned the bathroom and the common areas, she would say to me: ‘You are a golden boy.’ I replied that I only did these things because it was nicer that way and that I had learned it from my companions in Italy who lived in flats together.” She was

intrigued and sensed that the way Riccardo was had something to do with his being Christian, which Riccardo occasionally spoke to her about at dinner. Lilly became attached to him and did not allow a single piece of Riccardo’s life to pass her by. Everything she saw him do became a question for her: from asking his girlfriend to marry him to the four-hour train ride to Lund to visit one of the few families of the movement in Sweden. “In the ten months I was there, it was important for me to be able to spend time with them on the weekends. I did not know them before, but they welcomed me as I wished I could welcome my colleagues. On Mondays when I returned to the lab after being in Lund, everyone noticed that I was happier than usual.” Riccardo remembers the first time he showed up at Valentina and Matteo’s house. He was walking down the street between the colorful little houses, looking for theirs. At one point he saw a five-year-old running toward him shouting his name: “Riccardo! Riccardo!” It was their youngest son who had seen him coming through the window. “I thought about what an experience of friendship a child must have seen in his own home to show such enthusiasm for a stranger. In that moment it was clear that I too had bet everything on this attitude that was full of expectation for the other. When you discover this about yourself, you find yourself wanting the same with whoever comes your way.” ■



Andrea, first on the left, with friends in Brussels.



Belgium

Andrea, Painting and Visual Arts, Venice

I spent a year on an Erasmus in Brussels. My decision to leave was linked not only to an interest in growing in my studies, but also to a desire to bet on the experience I had encountered in the Movement. Erasmus meant getting out of my comfort zone of friendships, which I was in danger of taking for granted. It was a gamble that filled me with fear: I would be without my friends in Venice and without the language I needed to express my needs and ask for help. To my surprise, I decided to face the fear and leave anyway, following the intuition that a key opportunity to grow was at stake.

Finding myself in an environment where all certainties about relationships, places, and habits were gone made me rediscover, from the very first hours,

an openness without boundaries. The people I met, young people from all over the world and professors, people from the CL community, lived in a very tiresome cultural climate. Everyone had wounds and questions. Once, talking about one of my paintings with the painting professor, I used the word “truth.” He replied that it was better not to use that term because it was too problematic for him. Something inside me rebelled, because the hypothesis of a meaning of things and of life is something real for me. The need to affirm a hope, not a theoretical hope, arose in me from my memory of all the faces that have embodied my encounter with God.

Fr. Giussani defined mission as “an epiphany of identity,” and hence the manifestation of what we are. Once I was in the Academy cafeteria having lunch with three German friends. They asked me what I was doing the following weekend. I was going to Rimini for the spiritual exercises for university students and, at first, I was evasive. But at their insistence I explained to them what it was all about, and they peppered me with questions. In the end the most sensitive girl said: “I have never seen such a concrete faith in anyone.”

A Flemish girl from my studio asked to come to Mass with me to “better understand how I live.” From that moment on, she has never stopped accompanying me, even after my departure. She continues to talk to me about the Mass as one of the moments she looks forward to most during the week. She was not previously a believer, but she is slowly discovering her relationship with God with an impressive seriousness and passion. She once wrote to me: “At this time of transition in my life, when I feel I am terribly misunderstood by my parents, I have more than ever the desire for a love without duties and boundaries, a love that is free! I see this love in the way in which you look at the people in the community. The more I discover that Christ is involved in everything, the more I discover that in every aspect of life I am not alone, but am in relationship with Him.” ■



Group photo in Trondheim:
Ester in the center.



18

Norway

Ester, Architecture, Milan

In the middle of my third year I applied for an Erasmus in Trondheim, a small town six hours north of Oslo. When I was accepted, a question arose, which grew in intensity in the months leading up to my departure: “Who am I? What does what I am, a girl from the CLU, have to do with the world?” I sensed that I would be taking not only my history, discoveries, and desires with me, but also my limitations and hardships, which often shock me. I left with words in mind that my aunt had spoken to me the day before: “During your Erasmus ask Christ for everything in your heart. Do not spare yourself!” For me, being in Norway was really a radical test of my whole person, and therefore also of my faith, which blossomed again in an unexpected way.

Trondheim has never had large communities of the Movement—there are only a few people or couples in a few towns scattered around the country several hours’ drive apart. But the semester I was there, by grace, I found myself with five other young Italian people from the CLU. A deep friendship was born with them, not because of an affinity of character, but because of something we had in common, the history of faith to which we belonged.

At first it was tiring; I was scandalized by our differences and in prayer, often feeling pain, I would ask myself: “Who forces me to be with them? I can do the Erasmus life and meet a thousand other people in the world. Instead, after all, I look for them!”

Along with this friendship came the desire to go to Mass together. Trondheim is an international and multiethnic city, and we went to the Thursday celebration, which was followed by a dinner of young Catholics who came from all over the world. Fr. Francis once told us: “Help build the church where there is a community; make it grow without pretension on your part but giving everything of yourselves.” We did this because we saw a growing fondness for that place and especially for the faces that had increasingly become dear friends, so much so that some of them began to become part of our daily lives: we would study at the university together and have lunch together, have dinner on Saturday nights, organize trips. On Sunday evening there was Mass in English followed by a dinner for the whole community prepared by a woman who would cook the whole weekend for everyone, often paying for the food out of her own pocket. At a certain point, this woman could no longer offer this service and so Monsignor Erik Varden, the bishop of Trondheim, with whom we became friends, proposed that we take over her job. It struck me that we were spending all of Sunday cooking for fifty people, and that we did this not because we were cooks, but out of love for the place and to contribute to its growth.

My affection for the faces of those new friends and for those companions in the Movement made me realize that they are part of a story—the story of Christianity. In church we met Eritreans, Filipinos, Italians... we met the world in the church. And in this “great history” I recognized that I was loved in an unimaginable way, so much so that I could say: “I feel at home even in a place so far from home.” ■

A selfie in Lyon of Vittorio, a student at Milan Polytechnic.



France

Vittorio, Management Engineering, Milan

I left for an Erasmus in Lyon with a burning desire to find out whether my bond with friends in the CLU, which had become central to my life, was possible elsewhere. I wondered: Do the extraordinary friendships I experienced in Milan have the same authenticity when there is no CLU? Is the enveloping experience of community such an all-embracing factor that it is possible to live it with the same intensity elsewhere? If not, I thought, it was really like living in a bubble.

After the first month in France I had met so many people. I had not missed a single party. Yet, in regard to this question, I did not feel I was making any progress. On the contrary, the thing I felt was lacking in relationships was *attention*, even just a friend seeing you studying in the library and asking how you are. It is difficult to accept that you depend on a relationship with someone else. Yet this, which at first seemed like a weakness, became my strength: this search for a deep relationship became a sort of compass to follow. One evening, for example, I was with a group of Italian classmates: they were all accounting and finance students, all in their final year, with contracts already signed with the world's biggest investment banking firms. We were at one of their houses having a few beers, waiting to go dancing. But the topic of discussion deviated from the usual one, which was money. For the first time, after three months of knowing each other, everyone started talking about their families, how they had been brought up, even intimate details in their lives, topics that until then had been taboo. It

was as if a wall had fallen, and when it was time to go dancing, the host proposed that we continue the discussion. We all agreed. Another person, when it was time for bed, said: "Tonight was beautiful, why don't we do it again? We could have an aperitif together every three days." Since that day we have done so, and without fail, we have found ourselves in a riverside club talking about life.

Another episode that struck me concerned my Chinese roommate. At first we did not speak. We only communicated when I offered to cook something for her; she usually took her plate and went to eat alone in her room. But one night, coming home at two in the morning, she came to talk to me. I thought she wanted to complain about the noise. Instead, she asked me: "Are you religious?" I was very surprised—she had never seen me pray or go to church—and I said yes. And she, dryly, said: "I envy you, because apart from the things that life requires us to do—study, find a good job, be successful—you seem to have something worth living for." How could she say that with such certainty? And above all, what had she seen that was different in me as compared to everyone else? From that moment on, a great gratitude was born in me toward what I had encountered, a gratitude that carries with it a responsibility. It became clear to me that tradition, besides having to be regained, also has to be shared.

These are just some of the many dialogues I had in Lyon. In those months life was asking to be lived all together, without separation, within this explosion of new relationships. The root of what I had experienced with CLU held up even far from Milan. ■

I, a Muslim, thirst for their happiness

Meeting an Italian teacher and the impact of the “gifts” received from friends who are in love with life: This is the story of **Yersultan**, a Kazak student.

20

My name is Yersultan. I am twenty years old and I live in Astana, Kazakhstan, where I study history at the university. I encountered CL through Ramziya, who teaches Italian in my city. I met her because I needed some documents translated for a scholarship application to study in Rome. When I met her, I was struck right away by her eyes, full of joy and full of life. She talked to me as if we had known each other for years, even though we had just met for the first time. When I got home, I felt very uneasy, because actually what was in those documents was not right, and I did not want to betray or take advantage of her. Two days later I called her again and told her that I was no longer going to Italy but that I would continue to study Italian with her.

After a year had gone by, she invited me and other classmates to go on a trip to Italy with her friend Claudio. We visited Naples, Sorrento, Siena, Milan, and Como. It was an incredible experience that made me decide to keep studying Italian and to get to know the people who in time became my friends in the CLU here in Kazakhstan. At first, I had no idea what the CLU was, what doing School of Community meant, or who Father Giussani was. But what I lived together with the others in the CLU was such a strong friendship that it made me want to know and understand more. I was drawn by their way

of living so intensely, so openly, so in love with life. I wanted to be like them. I would have liked to steal their eyes and keep them forever with me. I thirsted for their happiness. And wanted to be with them all the time. At the end of last year, Ramziya invited me and others to go to Rimini for the CLU Exercises. While we were there, we met a group of Italian students and formed a friendship with them. I was eager to return to Italy so that I could stay with them and get to know them better. So, this year, when Ramziya proposed that we go to the Rimini Meeting and to the CLU Equipe, I did not have to think twice. My mother taught me not to accept gifts from people because to receive a gift means that one has to return the favor. Nothing is ever free. I felt so bad, because my Italian friends kept giving me “gifts” that I could never reciprocate. They gave me things that I did not deserve. I struggled with this and did not know what to do. Then, one day I mentioned this to Ugo, one of my Italian friends. He told me that my only responsibility was to accept what was being given to me and carry that gesture of gratuity with me. Initially I did not get it. However, I began to think that the time would come when somehow I would be able to return that gratuitous gesture.

I am not a practicing Muslim, and many in my fam-



ily think that it is better to be and to remain a bad Muslim than to risk becoming a religious fanatic. I have a friend who wears the hijab and prays five times a day. We have been friends for three years. Lately I have been thinking about the meaning of my relationship with her. I ask myself, what keeps us together? Does our friendship help us live our relationship with God? She pointed out to me that when I am with my friends from the CLU I am happier than when I am with her. I was not able to tell her why, and I still wonder myself. I want to be able to see the signs that God gives me through my relationship with her and my relationship with my other friends. What I am certain about is that following the CLU reminds me of who I am and helps me to be a more courageous and better Muslim.

Yersultan

Yersultan, twenty years old, a history major at the University of Astana.

The Religious Sense: New Revised Edition

LUIGI GIUSSANI

With a new translation by John Zucchi

A new translation of one of Giussani's seminal works

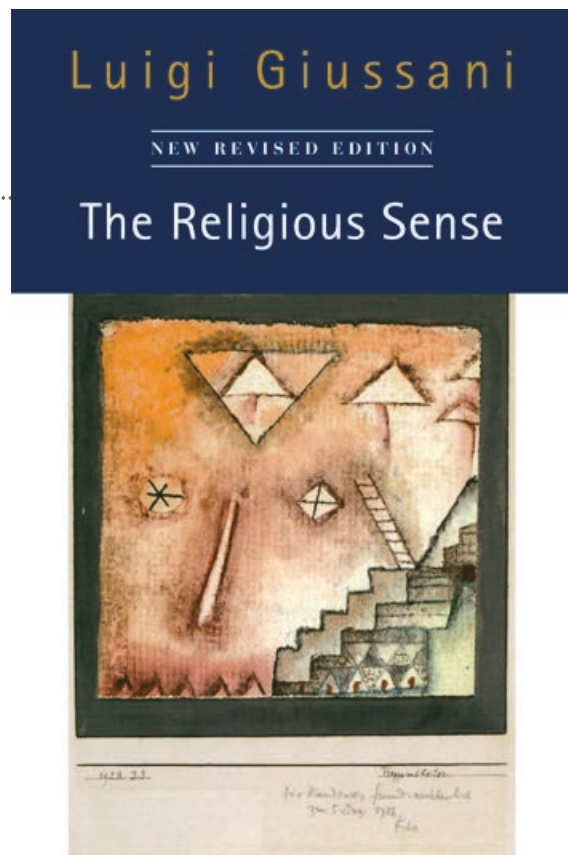
The Religious Sense, the fruit of many years of dialogue with students, is an exploration of the search for meaning in life. Luigi Giussani shows that the nature of reason expresses itself in the ultimate need for truth, goodness, and beauty. These needs constitute the fabric of the religious sense, which is evident in every human being everywhere and in all times. So strong is this sense that it leads one to desire that the answer to life's mystery might reveal itself in some way.

Giussani challenges us to penetrate the deepest levels of experience to discover our essential selves, breaking through the layers of opinions and judgments that have obscured our true needs. Asserting that all the tools necessary for self-discovery are inherent within us, he

focuses primarily on reason, not as narrowly defined by modern philosophers, but as an openness to existence, a capacity to comprehend and affirm reality in all of its dimensions.

Part of the so-called new religious revival, *The Religious Sense* avoids any sentimental or irrational reduction of the religious experience. It is a forthright and refreshing call to reassess our lives. In this revised edition, John Zucchi offers a new translation of this seminal and best-selling work.

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



February 2023
978-0-2280-1621-2
\$26.95, £18.99 paper
978-0-2280-1620-5
\$120.00, £100.00 cloth
6 × 9 192 pp
eBook available



McGill-Queen's University Press

mqup.ca | @McGillQueensUP