

THE TRUNK IS ROOTED WHERE THE TRUTH LIES

*The Self and the Other in the Life
and Thought of Father Giussani*

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FOR THE CANONIC INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE

Biographical Timeline

- ▶ **1922**
October 15: Luigi Giovanni Giussani was born in Desio (a small town in Brianza, north of Milan) to parents Angelina Gelosa and Beniamino Giussani.
- ▶ **1928**
Begins elementary school.
- ▶ **1933**
October 2: Enters the Diocesan seminary of St. Peter Martyr in Seveso.
- ▶ **1937**
Moves to the seminary of Venegono.
- ▶ **1939**
Forms a group with several seminarian friends, calling it "Studium Christi".
- ▶ **1945**
May 26: Is ordained a priest by Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster. He continues his license in Theology while teaching in the minor seminary of Seveso. In autumn, he begins pastoral work in a parish on the outskirts of Milan, which he later has to give up due to a severe respiratory disease.
- ▶ **1946**
Beginning of long periods of recovery, which last until 1949.
- ▶ **1950**
Having regained his health, he returns to teaching in the seminary and spends weekends doing pastoral work in a parish in Milan.
- ▶ **1951**
Occasional meetings with high school students inspire a growing desire to dedicate his life to educating young people.
- ▶ **1954**
Continues his doctorate in Theology with a thesis on Reinhold Niebuhr's Understanding of the Christian Meaning of Man. He begins teaching religion at the Berchet high school in Milan. In the following years he begins teaching also in other schools.
- ▶ **1955**
He is appointed Diocesan Assistant to Gioventù Studentesca (GS), or "Student Youth" the pastoral outreach for high school students.
- ▶ **1957**
He involves all of GS in the Mission to the City initiated by Archbishop Montini. Guiding GS, he renews its educational proposal. He also involves GS students in an activity aimed to educate them to charity called "Charitable Work". The Charitable Work takes place in Bassa, an economically depressed neighborhood of Milan.
- ▶ **1958**
A group forms around Giussani, the heart of which would later mature into the Memores Domini, an association of consecrated lay faithful who live in community.
- ▶ **1960**
Makes his first visit to Brazil, harbinger of the departure of the first GS students who would travel to Brazil as missionaries.
- ▶ **1964**
Begins teaching Introduction to Theology at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan.
- ▶ **1965**
Spends the summer in the United States to study the formation and organization of various parish activities. Upon his return to Italy, he leaves the leadership of GS, where the first signs emerge of the crisis that would reach its peak in 1968.
- ▶ **1967**
Leaves his teaching post at Berchet high school.
- ▶ **1968**
In the months marked by student protests throughout Italy, he lays the groundwork for a renewal of what later would become the CL Movement.
- ▶ **1969**
The name "Communion and Liberation" appears for the first time.
- ▶ **1971**
Oversees the founding of the Benedictine monastery at Cascinazza (outside Milan). Meets with the Archbishop of Krakow, Poland, Karol Wojtyła. Meets the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar and, through him, Joseph Ratzinger.
- ▶ **1975**
Begins a friendship with a group of Spanish families, who would begin the CL community in Spain. On Palm Sunday, March 23, participates in the pilgrimage initiated by Paul VI along with the Movement. Meets with the Holy Father after the event.
- ▶ **1976**
Participates in the Equipe of the leaders of CL University students (CLU), which would be a turning point in the history of the Movement.
- ▶ **1979**
January 18: is received by John Paul II. March 31: Attends the first audience with John Paul II with the CLU students.
- ▶ **1981**
The Memores Domini is recognized by the bishop of Piacenza, Bishop Enrico Manfredini.
- ▶ **1982**
February 11: The Pontifical Council for the Laity officially recognizes the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, with Giussani as the founder and president for life.
- ▶ **1983**
Is named a Monsignor by John Paul II.
- ▶ **1984**
Leads the CL community in a pilgrimage to Rome for an audience with John Paul II marking the 30th anniversary of the birth of the Movement.
- ▶ **1985**
Participates in a meeting in Avila, Spain, with the cultural association Nueva Tierra. Fr. Julián Carrón was one of the leaders of the association. In September, Nueva Tierra decides to join CL, and they attend an audience with John Paul II with the priests of CL. Giussani also oversees the founding of the Priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo.
- ▶ **1986**
Makes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.
- ▶ **1987**
Speaks at the Assembly of the Christian Democratic Party of Lombardy in Assago (Milan). Travels to Japan to meet a prominent Japanese Buddhist, Shodo Habukawa. Participates in the Synod of Bishops on the Laity as a member appointed by the Holy Father.
- ▶ **1988**
The Memores Domini are recognized by the Holy See as a Private Universal Ecclesial Association, with Giussani as the founder and president for life.
- ▶ **1990**
Begins a path of discernment with a group of individuals that would become the Fraternity of St. Joseph, an association of consecrated lay people.
- ▶ **1991**
Ends his time teaching at the Catholic University in Milan, having reached the mandatory retirement age.
- ▶ **1992**
Leads a pilgrimage to Lourdes for the 10th anniversary of the Pontifical recognition of the Fraternity of CL.
- ▶ **1993**
The Holy See recognizes the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption, a branch of an order to which he was connected since 1958. Begins directing the new "Books of the Christian Spirit" series published by Rizzoli, which would include over 80 books.
- ▶ **1995**
Begins publishing articles in secular newspapers in Italy, including il Giornale, la Repubblica, and Corriere della Sera. Receives the Catholic Culture prize from the School of Catholic Culture in Bassano del Grappa, in Veneto.
- ▶ **1997**
Begins directing the musical collection "Spirito Gentil" through an agreement with Deutsche Grammophon and other record labels. The series begins with a recording of Pergolesi's Stabat Mater and would include 52 other works. The English version of his book The Religious Sense is presented at the United Nations in New York.
- ▶ **1998**
May 30: Gives an address in St. Peter's Square during the meeting of John Paul II with Ecclesial Movements and new communities.
- ▶ **2002**
February 11: Receives a long letter signed by John Paul II on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Pontifical recognition of the Fraternity of CL.
- ▶ **2003**
On the occasion of the funerals of the members of the Italian military killed in the Nasiriya bombing, his message is read during the evening news of the public Italian TV station.
- ▶ **2004**
For the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Movement, he sends his last letter to John Paul II. Receives permission from the Archbishop of Madrid for Fr. Julián Carrón to move to Milan to collaborate with him in guiding CL. October: writes his last letter to the entire CL Movement on the occasion of the pilgrimage to Loreto, which marks the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Movement. Late December: his health begins to decline rapidly.
- ▶ **2005**
February 22: Dies in his home in Milan. February 24: The funeral Mass is celebrated in Milan's cathedral (the Duomo) by then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, as the personal representative of John Paul II. He also gives the homily. Giussani is buried in the Famedio section of Milan's Monumentale Cemetery, reserved for the city's accomplished citizens.
- ▶ **2008**
His tomb is transferred to a separate chapel built for him in the same cemetery.
- ▶ **2012**
February 22: at the end of the Mass celebrated in Milan's Duomo on the seventh anniversary of his death, President of the Fraternity of CL Fr. Julián Carrón, announces that he has presented the request to open the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Msgr. Giussani. The request is accepted by the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Angelo Scola.

The Trunk is Rooted Where the Truth Lies

*Who am I? What gives me value?
What does it mean to love and care for others?*

These fundamental questions at the heart of New York Encounter 2023 also concerned Fr. Luigi Giussani, priest, teacher, and founder of the movement of Communion and Liberation.

In his writings, speeches, and dialogues with friends, Fr. Giussani frequently explained the nature of the “I” in relationship with a “you,” and how this interdependence is the source of genuine connection, real community, and true charity. Rather than the familiar image of the self-sufficient, autonomous individual, this caring “I,” according to Fr. Giussani, seeks to be in relationship with its origin:

You are incapable of loving someone, of being a friend, if you have not recognized that you have been loved, or that you are loved by your father and your mother. The clear perception of being wanted, of being desired, of having been wanted and loved, of being loved... this is fundamental for our mental health. Everyone knows it, but no one thinks of the structure of the law found within that fact.

CLU Spiritual Exercises 1976

In his poem, “The Poplar Tree,” Clemente Rebora describes the branches of a poplar tree extending to the sky, trembling in the wind, while its trunk remains secured in place by the roots:

*The stern poplar
quivers with its leaves in the wind;
the soul convulses with its pains
in the anxiety of thought:
from the trunk to the leafy limbs
all stretched to the sky:
the trunk of the mystery is anchored
and the trunk is rooted where
the truth lies.*

Who Am I That You Care For Me?



This exhibit considers the “I” in light of Rebora’s imagery, as articulated in Fr. Giussani’s life and thought. Like the deep roots of the poplar, the “I” anchors itself in its true nature and origin as an invisible condition for growth, that is, bearing visible leaves and fruit in its stretching branches. Born out of the work of a group of friends from Canada, this exhibit is divided into four sections corresponding to the title of the New York Encounter.

Through selected writings and reflections by Fr. Giussani, the first three sections present the concepts of the “I”, “You” and “Care.”

The fourth and final section exemplifies, through witnesses, the understanding of the “I” in relationship with the other – “For Me.”

Section 1: The “I”

Section 2: The “You”

Section 3: Care

Section 4: For Me

A Neglected "I"



The supreme obstacle on our human pathway is neglect of the "self," the "I." ... If I neglect my "I," it will be impossible for me to claim my relationship with life as my own, to claim life itself (or the sky, a woman, a friend, music) as mine. To be able to say the word "my" in any kind of serious way, we must have a clear perception of the constitution of our "I." ... The very word "I" now conjures up a confused, fluctuating notion ... For this reason, one could say that we are living at a time when civilization seems to be ending: for a civilization only evolves to the degree that the value of every single "I" is helped to emerge and become clear.

In Search of the Human Face

This "I", this alienated "I", is "an "I" without God." The "I" without God is an "I" that cannot avoid boredom and nausea. So, we let ourselves go on living: we can feel ourselves part of a whole (pantheism), or else fall prey to desperation (the prevalence of evil: nihilism). "Nothing is further from me," says Claudel, "than the pantheistic conception, the idea of being, as it were, drowned in a world in which we dissolve ourselves voluptuously."

*The Miracle of a Change,
Fraternity Spiritual Exercises 1998*

A Boundless Need



Seriousness in affection for yourself is the perception of your own boundless need, but – I insist – not of your boundless need in the sense that you want a hundred thousand things ... It's boundless precisely because the "I" doesn't prefix any image of things that are needed: The I "is" need! Guys, the most serious thing in the world and life is you, your person ... The affection for your own humanity is the opposite of egotism ... it leads us to rediscover the constitutive exigencies, the original need of their nakedness and vastness.

Men Without a Homeland

[Fr. Giussani] was speaking of the violin concerto in D major, opus 61, with David Oistrakh. "When that piece was played that we just listened to, there was absolute silence in the classroom and the girl in the first row to my right named Milene Di Gioia (I still remember) suddenly started crying uncontrollably. I let her cry a bit and then I said, "You can see clearly the difference between one soul and another, between one's sensitivity and another's, between one heart and another heart." Those others certainly would not have wept. And so from that moment on that piece had special meaning to me. The yearning that the fundamental theme draws out – such a yearning that caused someone who had such a sensitivity as did Milene to weep – this yearning is an emblem of the awaiting for God that man has."

The Life of Luigi Giussani

I Do Not Make Myself



Picture yourself being born, coming out of your mother's womb at the age you are now at this very moment in terms of your development and consciousness. What would be the first, absolutely your initial reaction? ... At this moment, if I am attentive, that is, if I am mature, then I cannot deny that the greatest and most profound evidence is that I do not make myself, I am not making myself. I do not give myself being, or the reality which I am. I am "given." This is the moment of maturity when I discover myself to be dependent upon something else.

The Religious Sense

There was a woman who came to confession with me every week; then, for a while, she didn't come any more. After a few months, she came back: she had given birth to her second little girl. "If you only knew!" she told me. "The first feeling I had the moment she was out wasn't curiosity to know if she was a boy or a girl, or whether she was healthy or not. It was, 'That's it: she's already going her own way!'" ... "She's going her own way" means that whoever is born is born for their destiny, which even they don't get to determine, because vocation is given by God and God alone.

The Life of Luigi Giussani

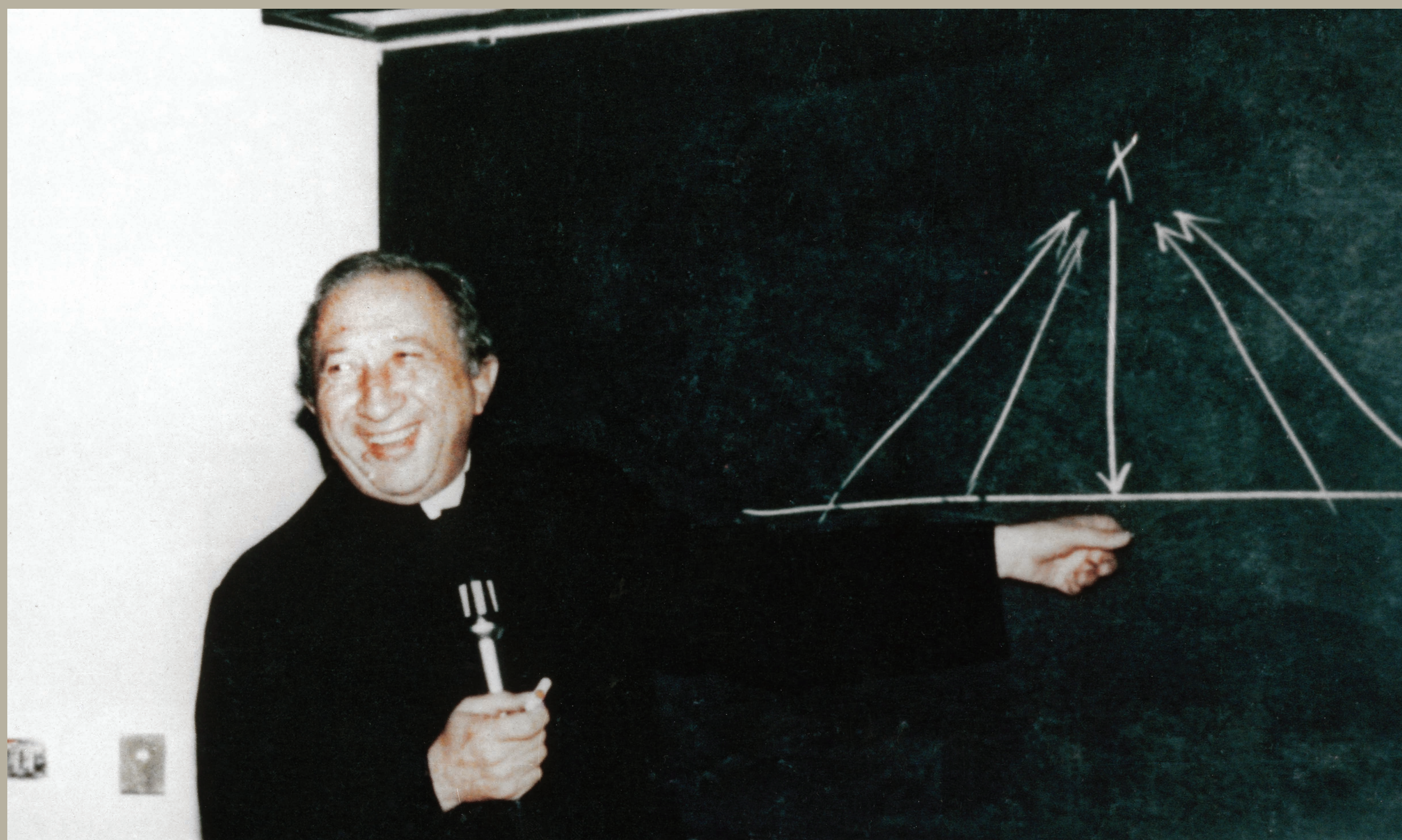
I Am You-Who-Make-Me

If I descend to my very depths, where do I spring from? Not from myself: from something else. This is the perception of myself as a gushing stream born from a spring, from something else, more than me, and by which I am made ... It is an intuition of this mysterious presence, which endows the instant, the "I" with substance (solidity, density, foundation). I am you-who-make-me – except that this you is absolutely faceless. I use this word "you" because it is the least inadequate in my experience as a human being to indicate that unknown presence which is beyond comparison, more than my experience as a human being.

The Religious Sense

For what qualifies the "I," what defines the "I" in the face of all the other human attitudes, what qualifies the "I" is precisely the consciousness that it is relationship with the Infinite: a woman is sewing, she is sewing or cooking in the kitchen, and she is relationship with the Infinite. What characterizes man is this paradoxical dimension between the little that he is, the very little that he is, the fuse that he is, between a littleness that he is and the constitutive relationship, a constitutive relationship which is the relationship with God.

*Abraham: the Birth of the "I",
Fraternity Spiritual Exercises 2001*



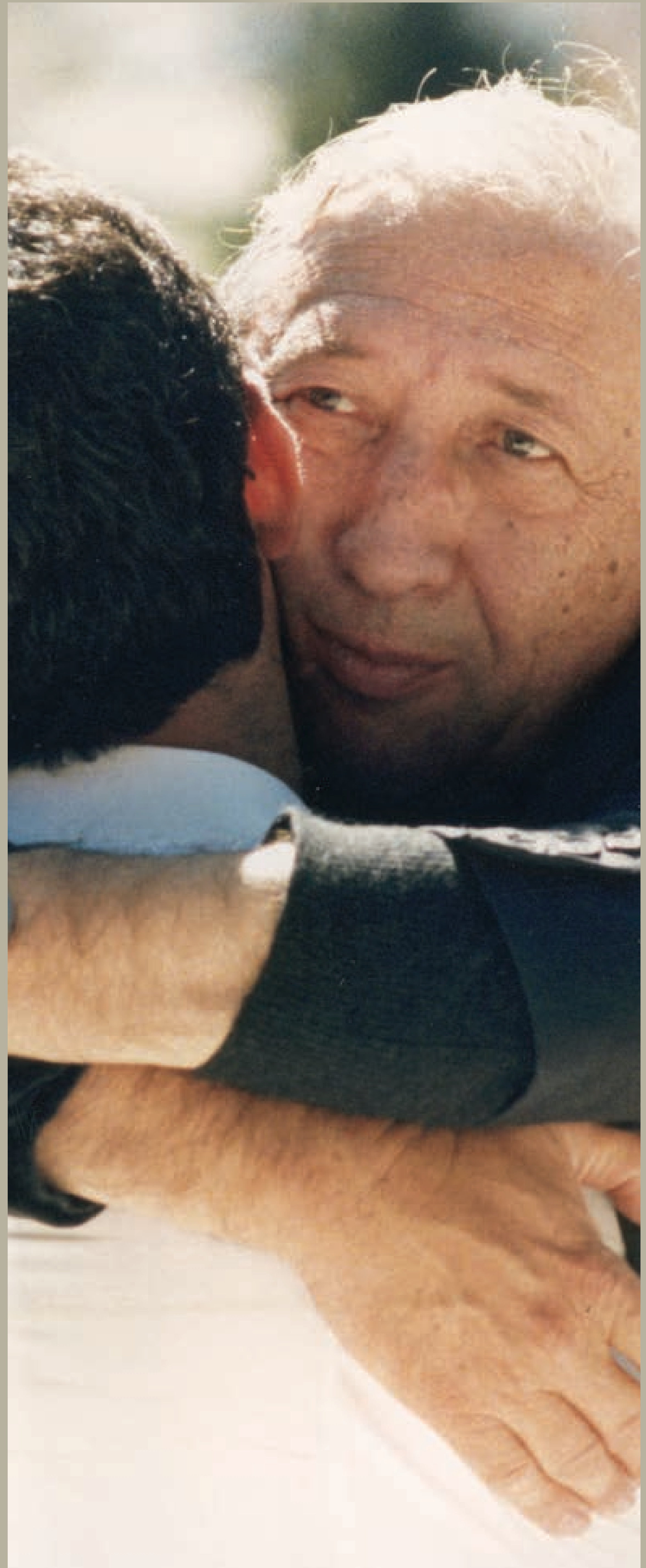
The Law of the "I"

There is a law, a law you should write down, a law of this self-awareness, of the life of this self-awareness, of this "I," of this person I am. And this "I" is priceless ... Let me formulate it: you recognize and love your own identity in loving an other. It is in recognizing and loving an other that the capacity for affection springs forth ... The generative criterion to love an other is the love I have for myself. We think how many times we've said this – we do not love others because we do not love ourselves. You are incapable of loving someone, of being a friend, if you have not recognized that you have been loved.

CLU Spiritual Exercises 1976

At a certain point, in front of the barrage of reasons Giussani launched, chuckling, Luigi [Squellerio] said, "Listen, all that you are trying so forcefully to tell me is not worth as much as what I am about to tell you. You cannot deny that the true grandeur of man is represented by Dante's Capaneus, that giant chained by God to Hell, yet who cries to God, 'I cannot free myself from these chains because you bind me here. You cannot, however, prevent me from blaspheming you, and so I blaspheme you.' This is the true grandeur of man." After a few seconds of being unsettled, Giussani responded calmly, "But, isn't it even greater to love the infinite?"

The Life of Luigi Giussani



Reality Reveals a "You"

The world, while it unveils, also "veils." The sign unveils, but at the same time it veils. And it is only a particular attention which allows us to sense, under or on the other side of this apparently inert fabric, the vibration of a living body lying behind it – not a mannequin, but a living body.

The Religious Sense

A famous poem by Montale, which I take the liberty of reciting: "Perhaps one morning, as I walk in the glassy, dry air / I will turn and see the miracle take place: / nothingness at my back, emptiness behind me / and I will feel the terror of the drunken man. / Then, as though on a screen, trees, houses and hills / will suddenly reappear – the usual deception. / But it will be too late; and I will go silently on my way / bearing my secret among the men who do not look back." When I read this poem by Montale, suddenly, immediately, I seemed to understand. Because this is the position in which intuition and mystical experience are kindled: this nothingness of things, this immediate perception of the nothingness of things, of the inconsistency of everything, of the ephemeral – that I was talking about before – is also the beginning of the experience of the Being of which everything consists and which sustains everything.

"God Needs Men," Rimini Meeting 1985



The Mystery Made Flesh



"He came to dwell among us." This is the event of the presence of Him who alone can reveal the mystery of things, the mystery of Being, that is, the mystery of life. Revealing the Mystery means revealing something that remains a mystery. No man has ever seen His face, the face of Being – no man! But you, o Child who comes, You came to reveal this Mystery, the Mystery that no man has ever seen.

"The Holy Rosary," Traces 2001

I remember once on the staircase of the seminary, while we were going down to the chapel in silence, Manfredini said to me, "Just think! God became a man like us..." He stopped short, and the phrase struck me: "That God became a man like us is something out of this world!" And I added, "It is something out of this world that lives in this world!" And, as a result, this world becomes different, more bearable; it becomes more beautiful.

Address for the Tenth Anniversary of the Death of
Enrico Manfredini, 1993

The Mystery of God in Another

Thus, all the relationships with man in Jesus are a sharing. There is no true relationship except in function of destiny: for it is towards destiny that every human need tends, every need of the participated being which is called man. When man lives this, accepts this, seeks in every relationship the destiny of the other, then all relationships are good, and in every relationship man accepts the help that comes to him from the Mystery through the other, however much or little it be, because through the other the Mystery helps man, much or little, when man lives relationships – the relationship with his companion, with the other – with the awareness of his destiny.

Thus, in any relationship we start with a positive hypothesis. The secret soul of each relationship is friendship: to want the other's destiny, to accept that the other wants my destiny. If I acknowledge and accept that the other acts for my destiny, then this is friendship.

*You or About Friendship,
Fraternity Spiritual Exercises 1997*

I decided that it was not good for me to continue in [the house of the Memores Domini] because the path I had embarked on demanded something else.

One morning I packed my suitcase and waited for Fr Giussani to arrive. It was now late afternoon. The door rings: he's there.

"Thank you, Fr. Gius, for everything. But it is not good for me to continue here. My humanity gets depressed."

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know."

"Then, wait, I'll go home and pack a bag and come with you."

He leaves quickly. The suitcase falls out of my hands and I decide to take a chance.

Where would I find another man capable of risking his whole self to follow the path that God was [showing me]? Where would I find such a faithfulness to the Mystery of God in another?

On his return, Fr Giussani tells me: "I have nothing to offer you, only that you come and live where I am."

So, he found me a small cell at the Little Sisters of the Assumption, where he said Mass every morning at 7 a.m. Faithfulness is the total gift of self to the other, because, first, one has accepted in oneself the total gift that is the Mystery of Christ in us and among us.

Testimony of a friend

Prayer and Communion



Self-awareness is the recognition of this, and from it springs forth an affection for yourself, for your life, for others and the lives of others; from it springs forth what is human, humanity ... The more I am aware, and, consequently, the more I am a personality, the more I go about looking at things, speaking with men and women with inside of me the transparent awareness of being made, of this presence that constitutes me, of this You – with a capital "Y" – that constitutes me, and prayer becomes the typical dimension of my life.

CLU Spiritual Exercises 1976

I enter the same church along with a hundred others, and by natural terms I am a stranger among strangers – people I've never met and may never see again. At an instinctive level, they are extraneous to me, resulting in feelings of being lost or alone. I take a minute to recollect myself and enter into a deeper awareness, reminding myself of who they are for me. Opening wide my heart, I cry out to God, "Lord, accept all of those present here, because they are yours; they are mine, they are part of me." ... My prayer is in communion and for the community, and my experience of prayer, the gesture through which I express myself to God, is fuller than it has ever been."

In Search of the Human Face

An Awareness of Others



I remember walking hand in hand with my poor father and every time we would meet our friends on the street he would say to me "Say hello, say hello." Thousands of times my parents said to me "Say hello" and "What do you say? Thank you or goodbye." This is how that supreme capacity for sharing one's life, which is called a capacity for relationships, was instilled in me by my parents ... Every night my mother would come and tuck me into bed and she would say to me, "Pray to God for those children who have no roof over their heads" as it was raining, or "Pray for those children who don't have a mother." Every night something different. In so doing, an awareness of others was developing in me, above and beyond the awareness of relationships that was instilled in me when she took my hand and said, "What do you say?" ... What I owe to my father and mother is that the faith, God, Christ, the wisdom of the Church, the saints entered into the judgement they made about daily life, as in the most beautiful example of my mother putting me to bed.

"Communicating Faith in the Family"

Imitating Charity

Being is charity ... Man must recognize and imitate this Mystery ... I want to bring everyone back to this recognition: Being is Mystery. How can we affirm this? Because we recognize that it is there! It is there! The Mystery is there! The Mystery can be imitated, that's how.

*"Being is Charity: In Our Lady the Fleshiness of Christianity,"
Traces 2002*

This charity is the paradox of my existence, in which is reflected the Mystery of the Existence of the One and Triune God: to be myself I must give myself to others.

Generating Traces in the History of the World

In one example, [Fr. Giussani] chatted with a beggar who showed people where to park in exchange for change at the door of a restaurant; he asked who he was, why he didn't have a job and if he was interested in looking for one. Then he asked whoever was with him to leave a telephone contact for some help in finding the man a job. Giussani's constant deepening of the essential factors of Christianity was always accompanied by the daily exercise of charity, both material and spiritual, towards a countless number of people, from his closest friends to total strangers, whom he met by chance and immediately considered to be companions on the journey with whom to share something of himself.

The Life of Luigi Giussani



The Meaning of Charitable Work

To be interested in others, to communicate to others, enables us to fulfill the supreme and, indeed, the only task in life: to become ourselves, to complete ourselves. We do charitable work so that we may learn to fulfill the task of becoming ourselves ... I am able to understand the word "charity" when I remember that the Son of God, loving us did not send us His riches (as He was able to do) and revolutionize our situation; instead He became poor like one of us: He "shared" our nothingness.

The Meaning of Charitable Work

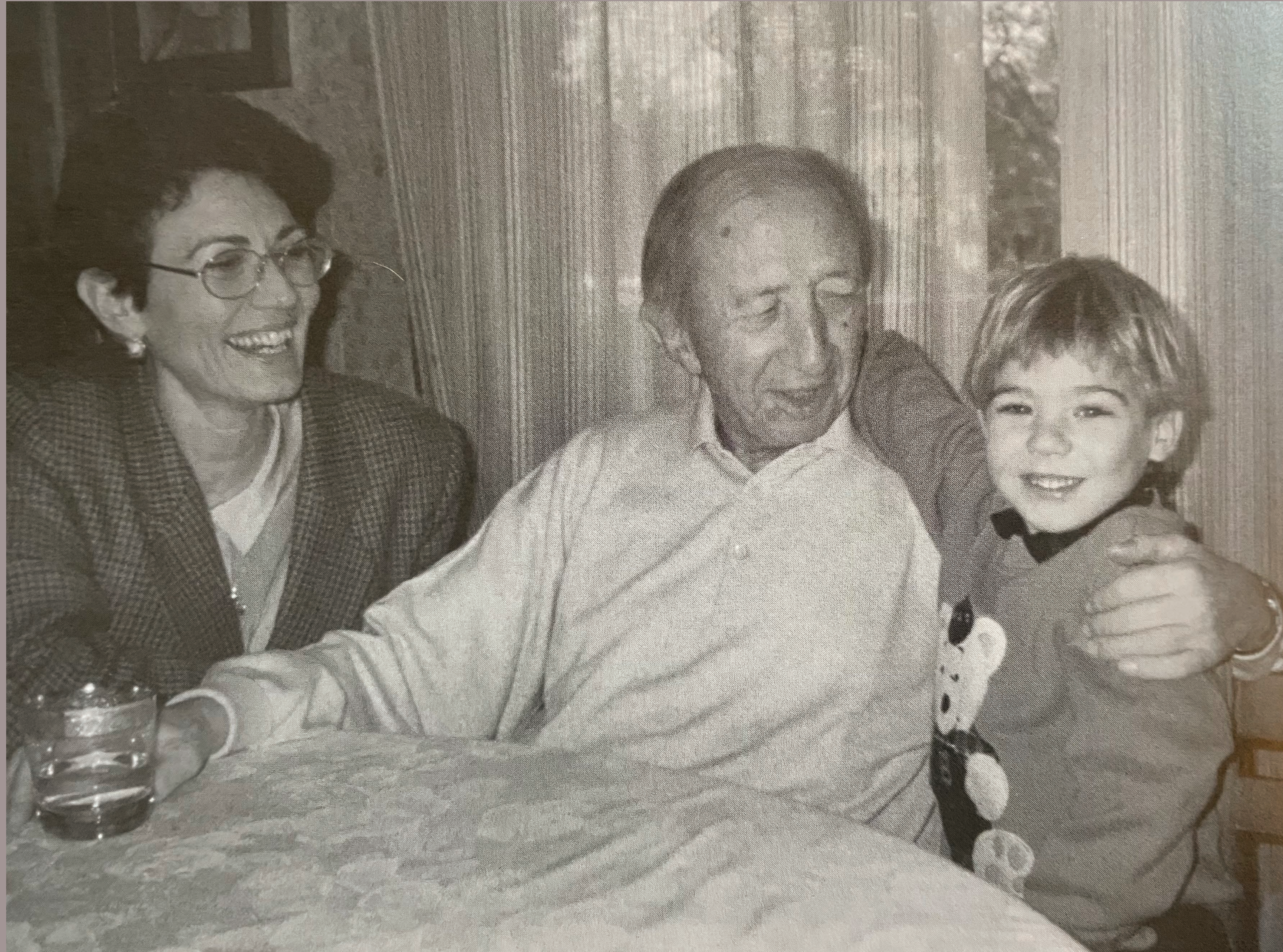
Even human needs, that man intercepts and tries to share concretely, can be thought of in a preconceived way ... If, on the contrary, the origin, the foundation, the founding principle of the whole human experience is an event – the only true alternative to preconception is something that happens, something that man comes across – if the criterion that suggests man's behaviour is an event, then this event is recomposed in history, in time, day after day, hour after hour.

The Miracle of Change, Fraternity Spiritual Exercises 1998

During a meeting a boy explained that he had given some money to a very poor woman. He was shocked when he found out that she had used it to buy lipstick ... Giussani answered him, telling him he had not understood anything about sharing, because he did not accept the others' need, but wanted to impose upon her his own moralistic program. He had not understood that in that moment the woman's real need could be the need to feel prettier, stylish.

The Life of Luigi Giussani

Affirming the Principle of Sharing



For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but it is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.

Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*

If we do not feel welcome or loved in the first place, we cannot share. In other words, we cannot make our presence part of another's presence, we cannot open our presence to welcome that of another. Here we see that, without God, it's like facing a problem without an adequate hypothesis. We can possess generosity, openness, a capacity for compliance, a great capacity to welcome – even if we do not live a human correspondence in any sense – if we have a clear perception of what is at the origin of our being: that is, if we live, it is because we are wanted and if we exist, it is because we are loved.

The Miracle of Hospitality

The Famiglie per l'accoglienza [is] "the beating pulse of the life of the movement ... We hope for you that you grow in awareness, too, because if you are more aware yourselves, then it becomes even clearer for us! It's like seeing someone going around at night all neon."*

The Life of Luigi Giussani

**Famiglie per l'accoglienza (Families for Hospitality) is a network of families who accompany each other in the experience of hospitality – adoption, foster care, care of the elderly and disabled – and propose it as a good for the individual and for society as a whole.*

Overcoming Difference



To better understand the foundations of the ability to welcome, you should think not of the homeless you can welcome in your house, but of your wife, your husband, or your son who grows older. If these factors do not emerge in your relationship with them, you are living these relationships obtusely or taking them for granted ... The great road we must take to make ourselves similar to the Bible's image of Christ – who comes to us from eternity, walking the path like a giant on our Earth – is in overcoming difference: mercy. Embracing another means embracing somebody different – remember that God is the Different, the ultimate Other.

The Miracle of Hospitality

Where there is a clear awareness of the supreme truth that is the face of Christ, in looking at everything that one encounters something good is revealed, because Christ is the consistency of everything. Ecumenism, therefore, is not a kind of tolerance that leaves the other a stranger, but it is a love for the truth that is present in anyone, be it only a sliver ... Someone who has discovered the real truth, Christ, will go forward serenely in any kind of encounter, certain they will find a part of themselves in everyone.

Man and His Destiny

Something Concrete

It had been a little over three years. We were married and we were still unable to start the family we so much desired. Infertility is not something you plan for. To top off the obvious suffering this was causing us, it also exposed so many of our differences. I found myself asking God, “Why did you trick me into falling in love with someone so different from me? And why did you give me the struggle of infertility and the inability to decide as a couple what to do about it because we don’t share the same views?” I went as far as even questioning whether our marriage was a mistake and wishing I never had this desire for motherhood at all.

One day we got an email invitation to the Jeweler’s Shop marriage workshop. After reading the outline, our “yes” was immediate and we began with a heart full of questions and a thirst for a path. Was this God answering my prayers? I still wasn’t pregnant, but for some reason I just felt so good. Through the course I began to breathe a little better and I began to consider what marriage as a vocation truly meant. I felt like I could rest this heavy bag I was carrying on something concrete and it made me consider the inconceivable. Could I still feel complete in my marriage, even without ever bearing children the way I always imagined? Was this enough for my happiness?

Being in a spousal communion allows us to see a part of reality that we cannot see alone. Was it really possible that all of this suffering was good for me? Was it good for us? Is it possible that the man who stood in my way is actually a way of me becoming more me? There were plenty of arguments that followed, but there was this peace in my heart that I never felt before, this little piece of concrete I was able to rest my life on. I felt reassured that my marriage wasn’t a mistake, but in fact almost designed for me, that it is good for me and for my own growth.

Kristina,
Montreal

The Possible Abode



And before you propose something to someone you have to make them experience the surprise of a freely given affection, unthinkable, unforeseen, through which a stranger acts as a friend, as one of my friends ... Thus the next time you can come here with two of your companions. I have done nothing other than to describe the movement or the dynamic with which from four young people we became 40,000.

Father Giussani to the first members of Communion and Liberation in Canada, 1986

Since 1992 we have been welcoming hundreds of elderly people of Indochinese, Vietnamese, and Chinese origin in our elderly services centre in Montreal. This centre continuously receives support from CL and especially from Fr. Giussani. In practice, the number one principle of hospitality is to make the other person comfortable.

The person being welcomed certainly needs our attention, but he or she often needs a manifestation of understanding more than an outpouring of compassion whose too-frequent expression can be disturbing.

In Buddhism, acceptance is a "karma" that is worth to the one who makes it a good credit in his life account. For a Christian, it is a man-

ifestation of faith in Christ, the One who represents love for the other, a love not bound by any condition, a love that accepts all differences that may disturb, and a love that is accompanied by a sincere desire to offer the best of Him, His life to save us.

So when I see the other, I go to him to listen to him, to tell him my understanding of his situation and eventually, to offer him my services. If he asks me why, I answer, "This is how life is, the life of a Christian, without pretence."

Raymond Le Van Mao,
President of the S.A.I.M. Centre and
President of SOS Boat People Canada

A Protagonist

Through faith we discover ourselves; by meeting God, you don't just discover God, but you discover above all who you are.

There was a time in my life when everything I did went the way I didn't want it to. No one was happy: the sick people I was caring for still complained; the poor people I was feeding still grumbled (they didn't get enough of anything); the children I was feeding and taking to school still stole. I felt like running away. I started living again, really working, when I had Someone who said, "You are Mine." I began to discover the truth of my own life and from there began an attraction, a fondness, a tenderness for my own life and for others. I began to live and work when I could concretely answer the question of "Who am I?" When this question had definite faces, which had first and last names, I became free. Paradoxically, I became free by belonging, that is, by having a connection.

Now I have a new knowledge of myself and of reality. The poor, the sick, the children – what I give them is not a stopper to their desire, but it is to introduce them to a greater desire, to a new awareness. The medicines, food, etc. are the tool to tell them, "You are bigger than this, you are bigger than you can imagine and you yourself are responsible." All the help I offer them is to introduce them to Something greater than me, which I do not own, but which we can recognize together.

Working and helping others for me has become fostering and bringing to the surface the value of the individual, offering timely friendship to which they can belong. The "I" that belongs becomes a protagonist because it has a face, receives a unifying consciousness of self and reality.

Rose Busingye



A Turning Point

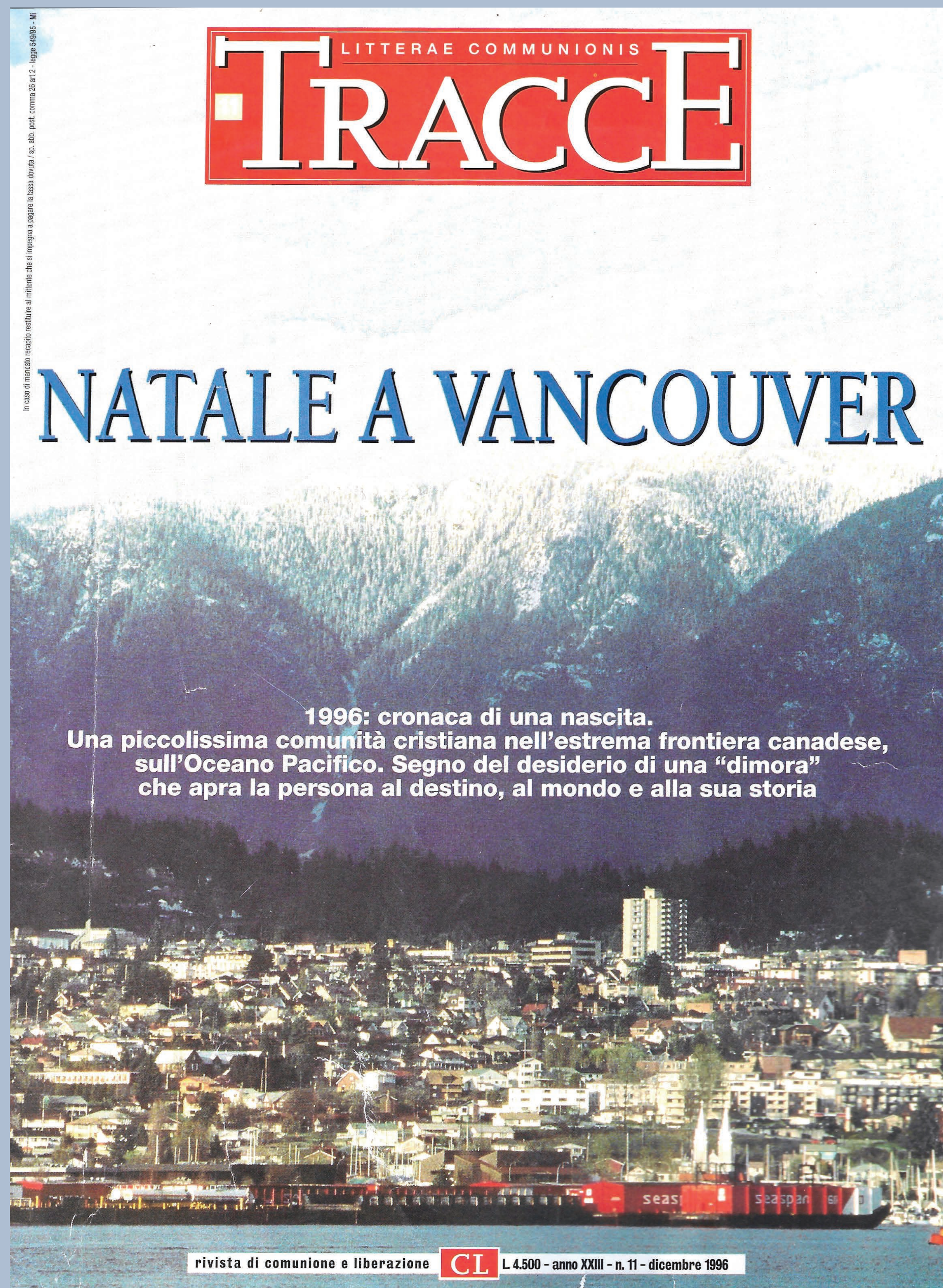
The following is an essay written by a fourteen-year-old girl. The theme of the essay assigned by her teacher was "Turning Points":

As I write, I listen to Chopin's 'Nocturne in C Sharp Minor.' Have you heard it? This four-minute song inspires so much beauty in my life, and I am left knowing that it must be everywhere, and it must be something everyone desires and seeks. As each chord in the music is struck with such vigorous passion, and the notes in the scales rise and fall, I no longer want to be the only one who is immersed in such wonder. Fr. Giussani tells us that God does not grace everybody all at once, but those who have received such a blessing should do everything they can to pass it on to others. So I ask myself two questions: Who am I to have received such a grace from God? But, even more, who am I to keep it all to myself? GS [Gioventù Studentesca or Student Youth], if anything, has changed the desires I have for the lives of others and myself. My sister inspired me, and she in turn was inspired by a friend, who was inspired by Fr. Giussani, who was inspired by his reality – by God. The greatest thing about the turning point in my life is that it didn't begin, nor does it end, with me.

Elisa,
Toronto, *Traces* 2009



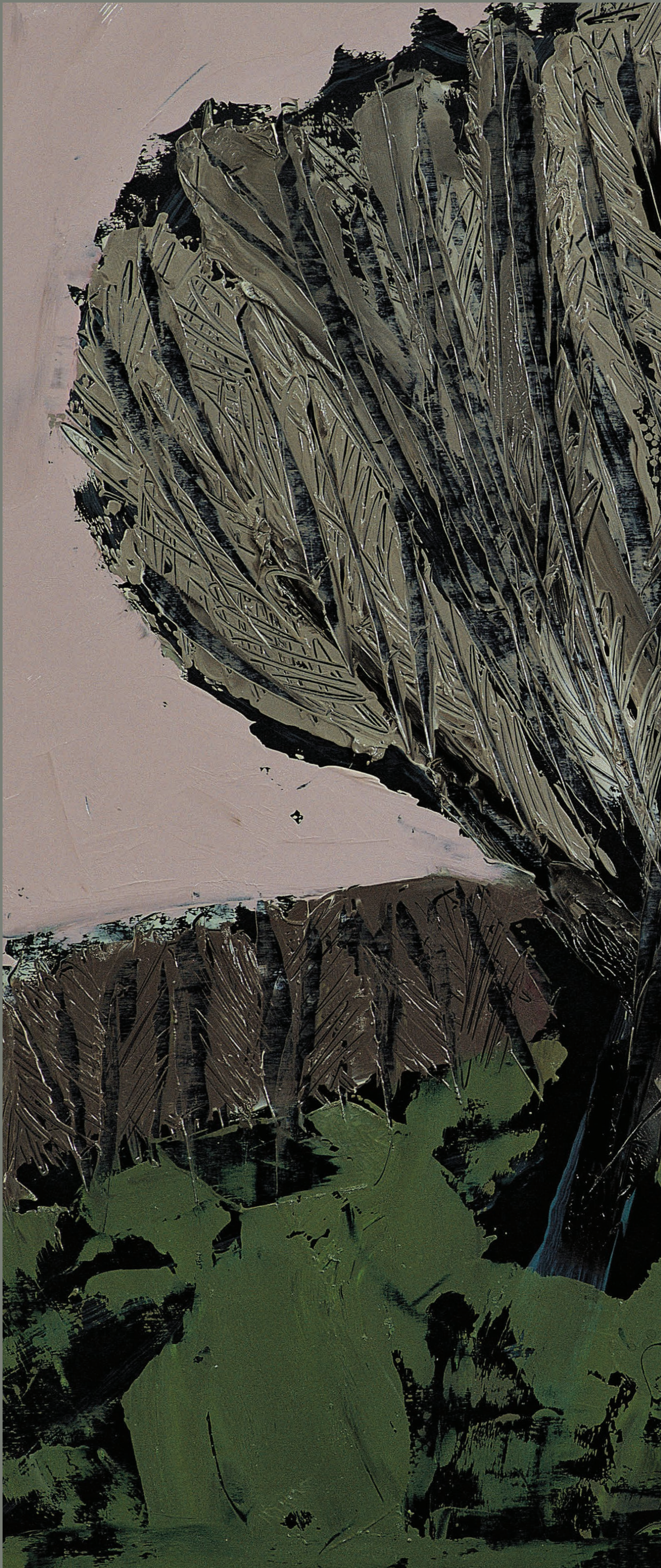
The Lineage



I visited Father Giussani in November 1996. When I told him that friends had started doing School of Community in Vancouver he was enthused. He told me that when he was ten years old he would take out a map of the world and single out Vancouver, and he would wish to go there some day. He immediately called Alberto Savorana and told him that the Christmas cover of Traces would have to be on Vancouver. Alberto objected that the issue was already in press. Father Giussani insisted that the cover would have to change. And so it did, along with a lead article on Vancouver. Then Father Giussani looked at me very seriously and he recreated the "lineage" by which the community reached Vancouver: "My mother met Christ," he began, "I met her, Ana Lydia [in São Paulo] met me, you met Ana Lydia [in Cambridge], Christine met you [in Montreal], and Steve met Christine [in Vancouver]." He repeated this another couple of times. What I took almost for granted, he considered with a perception of mystery and wonder, and at the same time of the carnality of this new event. I will never forget this.

John,
Montreal

Conclusion



“What is man that thou art mindful of him / And the son of man that thou dost care for him?” (Psalm 8)

Within this psalm lies the definition of the meaning of man’s life – his relationship with the one who creates Him. The whole cosmos reaches for a certain point of evolution, at which it becomes self-awareness: that point is called the “I”. [...] The greatness of man ... lies in the fact that man is in relationship with the infinite. To live what man is, to realize his person, man must grasp everything that God has done. Happiness is the final end of this process, the process of penetrating the eternal.

The Psalms

Who am I? Who is God that He takes care of me? If I measure myself, I don’t find anything left over. Why does He care for me? It’s not that we’ve found the answer, because it’s still moving to ask, “Who am I?” It’s not so much that someone should give me an answer; it’s a crying inside myself, and asking, “Who am I that you take care of me?” Because I’m nothing, I know.

Rose Busingye
“Who am I,” Traces 2021