

For the life of everyone

We offer here some long extracts from the meeting of the CL community in Taiwan with Julián Carrón, which took place last November 22nd by video link.

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Fr. Donato Contuzzi. In preparation for this meeting, each of us has looked at our own experience and our own encounter with the Movement. I was struck that at times we risk taking for granted a beauty that is absolutely exceptional.

Zheng Zhong. Before 2008 I didn't know God. In 2000, I began working in Taiwan for an airline company and I met the priests of the Fraternity of San Carlo. When Fr. Paolo invited me to teach a lesson at a university, I discovered that he was also a teacher, and this interested me greatly. I asked him what the doctrine of the church was and he invited me to a friend's home to participate in the School of Community. That friend later became my godfather at my baptism. In fact, more than a year after that meeting, I decided to be baptized and become Christian. I have no idea how I became so courageous since my family has always

been Buddhist. So on March 22, 2008, I received baptism. That year the priests involved me in the work of translating *The Religious Sense into Chinese*. In 2010, I went on a trip to Italy with them, and during those days I experienced in a deep way the charism of the Movement in a faraway land; in that world, there are brothers and sisters of the Movement who are like a family whose members love each other and take care of each other. Today I participate in the School of Community regularly, and through our reciprocal testimony, I am learning a great deal. Now when I read the question, "What saves us from nothingness?" I can respond with certainty: faith. During my first fifty years I was an individualist. I didn't know God and I lived a worldly life. In my second fifty years I've learned to enjoy the charism of *Another* by participating in the life of the community. It is my experience that the Movement is not just a movement of faith, but even



more it is putting into practice the love of God for women and men to the point of offering yourself. This is my mission.

Julián Carrón. Thank you so much. All of us can identify with your story because it is the story of each of us. Most of us were believers, but like you, we were amazed by the beauty to which we were introduced in living Christianity as Fr. Giussani pro-



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posed it to us. Listening to you confirms for us that what we have encountered, is also yours and for everyone. And we are amazed that Christ can so generously fill the heart of a man whom we did not know before and whom we now feel to be such a friend and brother. This is what Christ brought: responding to the fundamental needs of the heart for truth, beauty, and justice, to all of our need to be happy. In doing so, He makes us friends, sisters, and brothers who are grateful for the gift we have received and share. We hold this treasure, as you called it, which is for everyone. It is truly stunning that God chose such a human and simple way to communicate this gift to us: you, amazed by some people, desired to participate in the life that they were living among themselves. You said that you were far from God, but it doesn't matter

Taipei, Taiwan.

what situation we find ourselves in because when Christ reaches us through a person, He sets such a great beauty in front of us that we are attracted to Him. This is what makes Christianity so compelling, and it is the reason Pope Benedict told us and Pope Francis repeats that “it is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction’” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 14). Christ gives us a grace so that it will reach others. It is always stunning to look at the way God chose to save women and men. It is always astounding because nobody would have begun to change the world by choosing one person, first Abraham, then Moses, and then by sending His Son, and then the apostles, and on and on up to Fr. Donato and the other priests. He chose them in order to reach you. Thank you.

Xiao Rou. *I encountered the Movement in 2010. That year Fr. Paolo and Fr. Emmanuele organized a trip to Italy with some students. I was studying Italian at the time and one day I saw the photos of that trip on Facebook. They seemed very happy and I felt a bit jealous, above all of the friendship that shone in them. I looked for the CL website and decided to go and see. The first time I participated in a meeting I was very impressed. They talked about serious things like, What is solitude? What is the meaning of studying? I remember that I looked forward to the School of Community all week the way the Little Prince looked forward to seeing the fox, and also that this time of expectancy was one of fullness. Ten years have passed since then. When I graduated, I joined the Fraternity of CL and continued to participate in the life of the community, which was like a friend who led me to be closer to God. After graduation, work slowly took over most of my time and this affected my participation in the School of Community. I began to wonder, What’s the sense of speaking about such difficult things? and so I began attending less frequently, but then I discovered that my heart felt a great loss and that work could not give me even a small part of the fullness I felt in sharing life with friends during*

the School of Community. Now I participate every chance I get. In the beginning I also dragged along my husband, but now he has begun going without me, and this moves me greatly. I have a question. I am very committed to and involved in work and also in the Movement. I would like to be like the Memores Domini, who help God and Jesus during their work and activities. At times, even in the activities of the Movement, it seems I am simply a person who helps and that I don’t truly participate in what is happening. I feel emptied. How can I improve?

Carrón. Thank you. Christianity is simple—only two things are needed: the heart, your heart, which desires to be happy and contented, and meeting someone in whom you see the fulfillment of that desire. It is easy to recognize this because it is not an everyday occurrence to come upon people who are so happy that you desire to participate in their happiness. After graduation you thought you could distance yourself but found that you were missing something. Christianity is not a prison: the Christian community has always been a free place. Your friends respected your decisions because Christ wants friends, not slaves or servants. This is why someone can leave and then take time to understand why she should participate in a place like this. When you leave you discover that your heart feels a great lack, and in this lack you understand who Christ is. When you miss Christ, you understand more clearly who



A School of Community in Taipei.

Fr. Emanuele Angiola
with Wan Ru (left)
and Ya Han (right).



He is, whom you have encountered, and this experience teaches you far more than any lesson on Christianity. This is the way Christ attracts us and accepts the risk of our freedom. He does not need any forcing or rules: He fascinates us, period. People cling to Christ out of an honest and sincere acknowledgment of the fullness they are living. When people begin to participate in the Christian community and listen to the Gospel, they understand that Jesus talks about Christianity as a treasure, for which a man sells everything he has to buy the field where that treasure is hidden. These words would be incomprehensible (what is this treasure?) if you had not experienced them through an encounter. The experience that has come down all the way to us began at a precise point in history, a beginning called “Jesus.” When people encounter Him—as happened to you—they want Him to fill every moment of their lives. This is why, having seen those who live the vocation of the *Memores Domini*, you feel the desire for your life to be filled with His presence like theirs is. This is the great gift God has given all of us who belong to the movement: the *Memores Domini*. Through their vocation, you can see a person like you, who lives immersed in the world like everyone, but is determined by the memory of Christ. It is very significant that the *Memores Domini* come to your mind and not us priests; you need to see someone who, in your same circumstances, lives Christ the

way you desire to live Him in every moment. The mystery has given us someone in whom we can see the fulfillment of what the heart desires, we who do not know how to reach this. How can Christ increasingly fill every moment of your life, even in your work? This happens if you live a relationship with your friends, in which you seek Christ with them. Being with them, the desire that He become ever more present in your life emerged and grew. Just as you saw it begin, so you can see it develop by following the same method: participating with all your friends you have encountered in the new life that the mystery gives you in this place. Over time you will see how Christ will become ever more familiar to you.

Yi Han. *I am in the third year of the university. When I was a freshman, I got involved with CL because a friend of ours invited me to the School of Community. This gathering begins with at least two songs, usually one in Chinese and one in Italian. I really like this way of beginning because I think singing together helps to put us in the right frame of mind and enter into communion with others.*

If someone asked me what we do in our gathering, I would say that it's a bit like “chicken soup for the soul.” We focus on questions about and events in our lives that we normally can't talk about with others. We don't share just problems, but also beautiful experiences, and so it seems to me that our friends who participate in the meeting share a bond that is different from that shared with others. It's like a mysterious power, a great circle of invisible light that envelops our meeting. Once I related this to the friend who had invited me, and he said that this thing is called “friendship.”

I participated with Fr. Paolo and other students in a trip to Italy. The thing I liked most was that every evening we sat in a circle to share what had happened during the day. Usually we live frenetically and rarely stop to think about what has happened during the day, as if everything that happened didn't happen.

I remember that for the first two months of the School of Community I never spoke; I didn't dare. Every time Fr. Paolo asked me, “Do you want to say something?” I shook my head and said, “Next time.” But once I got to know these friends better, I began to share my own experiences too, and I am often moved to the point of

tears. For this reason I think that CL and the experience I had in Italy are the “maestros” of life. These “maestros” have made me less timid and better able to listen to others and to share what I feel and experience. I was very lucky to enter into the Italian department because I have succeeded in coming out of myself and have met this company of friends.

Carrón. If Fr. Giussani had heard you he would have jumped up from his seat because you grasped the reason he had us sing at the beginning of every gathering: to put us in the right state of mind for listening and seeing what would happen. Instead of expending many words to prepare us to be attentive, he had us sing. The fact that you understood this without anyone explaining it to you speaks volumes about Giussani’s sensitivity and capacity to perceive the most intimate aspects of each person’s heart, and how, with his educational genius, he then transformed that into a gesture. This is the Christian method: God makes something happen to enable us to understand. In order to make us understand what love is, He has us fall in love. In order to make us understand what friendship is, He causes us to become friends; in this way we can understand truly what we are talking about when we use the word “friendship.” When you saw the realization of a true friendship, you compared it right away to other types of friendships. You noted that

there is a different bond among the friends who participate in the School of Community because here “we don’t share just problems, but also beautiful experiences,” that is, everything. In this way, we begin to experience that this friendship is totalizing and embraces everything in life. It is interesting that even before using the word “Christ,” you were already experiencing Him through the difference you encountered in your new friends. The same thing happened to the disciples. Like you, they were drawn by a certain type of friendship, the one that grew among them around Jesus, and so, in being with Him, they began to ask themselves, Who is this man? This is the “maestro” you ask for. Who generates a friendship like this? “It has made me less timid”; that is, it has caused your humanity to blossom, it has caused you to emerge as an “I” and has opened you, made you “better able to listen to others and to share what I feel and experience.” This friendship that reaches everything grows closer and closer, and you expressed the outcome in one word: you are “lucky.” This is what we Christians are. We are lucky to have encountered this different experience of living the life that everyone lives. This is why we desire Him to dominate more and more our waking each morning. Just imagine how it would be if instead of waking up already worried about the things you have to do, you let yourself be suffused with the awareness of how fortunate you are. How different the whole day would be! This is why our affection for Christ and for the place where He generates us constantly continue to grow more and more. We thank Fr. Giussani, that “maestro” who generated this place with the grace that God gave him for all of us.

Xiao Ping. My father was ill and bedridden for fifteen years before he died. In those years he lived in a nursing home near a church, and a group of the faithful regularly went to visit him. Even though I didn’t know them, I was very grateful because in this way my father was not abandoned to the darkness of illness. I told myself that in the future I would like to help those in need, too. Then at the Spiritual Exercises I heard about charitable work with the elderly and I wanted to go. I began this school with other friends in order to learn to love and be loved. Today



Fr. Donato Contuzzi with Xue Ning.

I can no longer participate because of my own illness, and I told Father, "Even if I can't go with you, I'm not sad, but glad," because every day I go to physical therapy and there are many ill people there with me. I've begun spending time with them and many encounters have happened. (Her testimony is in the January issue of Traces and on clonline.org.)

Carrón. Thank you. The method is always the same. She came upon the Christian experience when she saw some people who went to visit her father; she perceived that it was a grace to see that he was not abandoned. Even though she didn't know it, this experience was the summary of why God sent His Son into the world: so that we would not feel abandoned. But first He made it happen in front of your eyes with your father, and only later did you come to learn that their gesture, their charitable work, had begun in a nearby parish where they lived the memory of Christ present. Who would have thought that the mystery was preparing you for when you would fall ill, so you would not feel abandoned and could testify to all those there with you doing physical therapy that you were not sad, but glad? In this way you understood that for which we have been chosen: to bring the presence of Christ to all those who feel abandoned. Christ called us precisely for this, to be able to bring Him to all those who have our same problem: the fear of abandonment. When Fr. Donato told me about you last summer, I was so struck that during the Beginning Day I told everyone what you had understood. You understood it for all of us, and this is the most beautiful gift you have given us: you have made us aware of why this grace has been given to us. And

so you have become the "beating heart" not only of the Taipei community, as Fr. Donato said, but of the whole Movement. We will always carry this gift in our hearts and it will be linked to your name: Xiao Ping. Thank you.

Qi Fang. *For two or three years I was absorbed in caring for my husband, grandmother, and mother, all of whom have since died. In that period I asked the Lord to be a true support for me. The people close to me thought that I was strong, while actually I know I'm very weak and have to entrust myself totally to the Lord. The bond with the presence of Jesus in my life is a very mysterious experience of companionship. When this whole period ended, I felt an emptiness because I freely and knowingly decided to distance myself a bit from the Lord, not to be such a friend, so intimate with God. My attitude, what I felt, was defined by nothingness. So here is my question: the people I love have all gone to heaven and now I don't know what road to take. What is the objective of my life, beyond eating and the rest? What is the strength of my life? How can desire be a medicine against nothingness?*

Carrón. These are very beautiful questions. As you saw, when life presses us, we live in tension. During the period when your family members were ill, life pushed you and did not allow you to step aside; you felt all of your need and this made you cling to Christ. Even if people thought you were strong, you knew you were weak and that He provided mysterious companionship. After the deaths of your loved ones, you saw that tension lessen, and so you ask what is the meaning of life for you now. You should allow yourself the time to grasp the signs through which the Mystery will reveal your goal. In any case, you do have a goal, the one that Xiao Ping mentioned: sharing with others what you received for living when you were facing the illness of your family members. You have added a key piece to the drama of living—when loved ones die, our desire appears to fade away. You make a beautiful connection: a lack of desire is what draws us closer to nothingness, causing us to become increasingly less ourselves. And so you wonder what or who rekindles desire. I have often met people who have lived or are living moments of stress like the illness of a loved one, but then, when the situation changes, the tension lessens too; then they remember those moments almost with nostalgia because they felt alive and full of tension. But as you can see, this thought is not enough to keep desire burning permanently. So who frees us from nothingness? At this point, Christ appears again. Christ is the one who can constantly rekindle our desire; we do not need things to go badly to live this tension. Christ came so that we would never feel abandoned to our degradation. There is a fascination for a presence that is so attractive that it continually rekindles our desire. What would life be without Christ? We are truly fortunate because Christ came to keep us from being sucked into nothingness, and this makes us full of the hope that your loved ones who are gone, who are already in front of Him who rekindles desire, will perhaps tell you what your purpose is. What is more interesting in your life than crying out to everyone that only Christ rekindles desire and keeps us from falling into nothingness? The one true goal of living is that for which we were born and for which Christ had us encounter Him: to cry out to everyone what we pray in the Psalm, "Your grace is worth more than life." Who knows how you will discover Christ filling you with Himself for all of us! ■