

Kharkov responds to Madrid

Notes from the assembly of CL communities in Eurasia with Julián Carrón, a “long-distance dialogue” catalyzed by the challenge posed by Rosa Montero in *El País*.

What makes the *here and now* a beginning and not the end? (Video conference, May 29, 2021)

Jean-François Thiry: Good morning, everyone! There are almost 200 of us, connecting from different countries. Fr. Julián, thank you so much for finding the time to examine with us the journey we’ve been walking over the past few months. We received many witnesses and questions that document how this time has not passed in vain and how we can verify whether we have hope or not.

Daiva: *In March, my husband went home to the arms of the Father. He died at work. When I arrived, the doctors were trying to revive him. I prayed, standing outside the door, supported by the people who were there. I prayed, asking not to lose my husband, but continually adding, with full awareness, these words: “Whatever God’s will is, I accept it.” I accepted it, and I didn’t blame God, nor did I blame my husband for going. I knew even the worst things that happen are for our own good. This awareness does not eliminate the loss or the pain, but it helps me to keep hope alive. That same evening,*

after the death of my husband, we connected online with our friends from the Movement to pray the rosary. I was touched to see how many friends participated. On the screen, I saw many tiny windows, not only with the faces of friends, but also their families. Through them, I felt God embracing me in my pain. To the question, “How are you?” my husband always answered, “Every day closer to Paradise.” He always sought to live here and now. I believe that he is already immersed in the Father’s embrace, and from there he is watching out for me and our children and our friends who, in times of difficulty, ask for his intercession. He is not beside me, but he has left me many friends, thanks to whom I do not feel alone; I am living the experience of God’s people. I have received many letters and messages. Many people came to pay their respects to him. Although it was not long, his life was given for the good of whoever was around him. He was very impressed by the insistence of Fr. Giussani that we must love our wives, our children, and our work out of love for Christ. My husband always tried to live

that way. I do not know what I would be, or how I would live with the pain of this loss, if I did not belong to the Movement. The education that I experience in the Movement gives me strength and hope. I thank God for having sent these friends from CL into my life, and for having shown me that the road worth traveling is to follow my friends and to follow Christ.

Julián Carrón: Thank you for this witness that shows us that, when such painful things happen, we can become more aware of the grace that we received when we encountered the Movement. It is not, in fact, automatic to say, as you did, without blaming anyone—not God and not your husband—“This is God’s will, and I accept it.” It is a testament to the journey you’ve traveled. This first witness places in front of all of us the method through which each of us can verify our own journey: the verification of the journey is not our thoughts or our interpretations; it is our “I” in action. When we are faced with reality, in whatever form it takes, what emerges is our ultimate outlook on life. We see, therefore, as our friend says, to what extent the education of the Movement, what Fr. Giussani has communicated to us, has penetrated our lives. Not so much as a way of measuring ourselves, but as a suggestion of the road we need to walk. Reality offers us signs to verify whether the education we receive is penetrating us; that is, if the Movement is really the Movement. At every moment of our journey, each of us can see whether the reason for which Fr. Giussani started the Movement is realized in our lives. That reason was clear to

him from the first day he climbed the stairs of the school where he was to teach and where CL was born, Liceo Berchet: “to demonstrate how faith is relevant to life’s needs” (*The Risk of Education*, McGill-Queen’s University Press [MQUP], Montreal 2019, pp. xxxi-xxxii). The verification of this is not found in our interpretations, our discussions, or in what newspapers say. The verification of the journey we have traveled is in the “structure of [our] reaction” to reality, to use an expression from Giussani in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* (MQUP, Montreal 1997, p. 100), in response to any event. And the most challenging of all events is death. So, I thank you because your witness has shown us the road, the method by which we can always recognize whether we are walking the educational path the Movement introduces to us, or not. None of the rest matters, so let’s not waste our time measuring ourselves. What concerns us is whether the Movement’s proposal, the gaze the Movement educates us to have (“This is God’s will and I acknowledge it; I accept it; I embrace it”) helps nourish in us more and more a judgment so full of light it helps us to adhere; a judgment full of affection. We see it every day, from the moment we wake up in the morning: what sentiment prevails in me? We don’t necessarily need a death or something that makes us suffer. All we need is to recognize what is giving us life the moment we wake up.

Anna Kim: Every point, every judgment, and every witness from the Spir-

itual Exercises of the Fraternity were living words for me, ones that touched my heart and directly applied to my life. You spoke to us with the love of a father, trusting our freedom as adults. Thank you for this! One of the most important points for me was about “the place of hope,” when you said that it is “a place [in which]... Christ is present and alive” (J. Carrón, *Is There Hope?*, Ed. *Nuovo Mondo*, Milan 2021, p. 137). It was about the companionship. This past year has been very dramatic for me, as it has been for everyone. But it was also a time of grace because, through the pain, the deprivations, the difficulties, and the trials, I clearly recognized that witnesses, my friends in the Movement and our community in Karaganda, are as necessary for me as the air I breathe. I saw how, outside the community, my life fades; it is obliterated. My “I” withers and I become like “a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid” and I realize that I say, “I hope so...” but without hope. Soon, I will have to leave Karaganda for a long time, and will live in difficult conditions, facing a great number of challenges. I will be in a place where the Internet doesn’t always work very well. How can I not lose hope? How can I experience the “fullness of Christ” outside of the community?

Carrón: Wonderful! This move will teach you what you mean by the words “community” and “companionship.” You will test how you have lived the companionship during your time in Karaganda. You will be able to realize whether you have lived it for what it is—that is, the thing that continually introduces us to the discovery of a meaning for life, as a gaze we have to learn continually, so you will also have to



learn it in the new place—or as something mechanical in which, by being physically present, you think your self-awareness automatically grows. In the face of this new situation, you will understand what really accompanies you. That doesn't mean you won't need a companionship or that there won't be a companionship where you are. It will be up to you to recognize it, in the way Christ makes it possible for you to experience it, the way He accompanies you in the new place. Your move will be an opportunity to go deeper in understanding the content of the companionship you met in Karaganda. It is a real challenge, to help you understand that the things we say to each other are not just words. All we have to do is think of how we lived this time of pandemic, during which we could not do many things in person. We all saw that those who were really willing to be accompanied, in the way that the Mystery allowed—gestures by video connection, such as the Exercises and School of Community and reading the texts proposed—learned and understood something essential for life. Now, all of us, whether we like it or not, are testing whether or not during the pandemic we learned and understood something useful when we faced

new challenges. Think how many of us thought that the arrival of the virus, with the consequent impossibility of participating in the gestures of the Movement in the usual way, would make us feel orphaned, would deprive us of the community, preventing us from enjoying the witnesses! Instead, what we have experienced in recent months has made us aware that Christ continues to keep us company in unexpected and unpredictable ways. So, you can leave and go where you must go with curiosity: "Let's see how Christ will keep me company in this new situation." This is all the more interesting considering your current communication possibilities—nothing you've had so far will be taken away from you. Right now you can connect to the gestures of the community in Karaganda; you can continue to develop the relationships with your friends; you can go to the CL website to read updates from the life of the Movement around the world; you can continue to receive all the richness of life of the Christian community of Communion and Liberation. The community will accompany you everywhere, even if you go to the ends of the world! The only question is whether you, in the new situation in which you find yourself, will accept a certain mode of companionship, as you accepted it during the time the pandemic was spreading. That way, you will be able to see what incredible maturity you can gain by going deeper into the value of the companionship. Then you can tell all of us about it.

Anna Kim: *Thank you!*

Lali: When you talked about waiting and expectation at the Spiritual Exercises, I remembered a colleague at work, whom I asked how things were going, whether she liked what she was doing. To these questions, my colleagues usually reply that it is better not to expect anything, because then you risk being disappointed. Better not to wait for anything, so you will not be disappointed. I remembered that this happened once in my life: I waited for certain events to take place with an idea of how I wanted them to go, but they went otherwise and then I felt great disappointment and sadness. I was reminded of it reading the text of the Exercises. When I listened to the School of Community with you, I was struck when you said that we can only understand what we read and what we witness at the School of Community and at our meeting after we have lived it. For me, it was an answer to a question I previously had because, after the catastrophic events that occurred in my life, above all the death of my husband, it was as if I was stuck. I did not feel hope or expectation in me. Yesterday, my mother and my aunt both got out of the hospital; they are still very weak yet I am grateful that they are better. But when they were in a critical state, between life and death, I could not understand and I wondered:

*“Even now,
as we begin to
slowly return
to our usual way
of life, each of us
will be able to see
whether we have
wasted the time
of the pandemic
or whether
we have grown.”*

“What is happening in my life? What does God want from my life? Why does all this have to happen to me now?” In this terror, I suddenly realized, with a clarity I never had before, that God was embracing me. Along with this feeling of being embraced, hope also appeared; I realized that everything had been taken away and all that was left was hope. This hope allowed me to lay down at least a little of that burden I had been carrying because I was able to share my questions with the One who can really respond. Rereading the School of Community, I understood that this hope, which appeared a month ago, or maybe three weeks ago, generated expectation and faith in me. It is an expectation not like the one before, when I knew what I wanted and how things had to go, but an open waiting, full of need, full of attention and thirst for fulfilment. Then I asked myself the question, “What is this waiting?” and I realized that it is waiting to be happy, with great openness and simplicity.

Carrón: Can I ask you a question?

Lali: Of course.

Carrón: How did you come to the awareness, so suddenly, that God was embracing you? It seemed like you were not expecting anything and you asked yourself, “What does God want from my life?” Then, suddenly, something happened to you: “I realized... that God was embracing me... and hope appeared.” How did that intuition begin in you?

Lali: At that moment, my thoughts, my strength, my way of seeing, and my attempts were so small, but my sense of being nothing, a beggar, was so strong that, in my begging, misery, and poverty I was brought to silence. The “loudest” thing of all was the expectation. I realized that I cannot do anything now because I’m powerless, I’m needy; I can only cry out, pray, and ask. And, in that moment, a smile appeared amidst the tears, along with the concrete feeling that, apart from hope, there was nothing else left. Everything was lifted from me, except for hope. Or I could say I gave permission for something that has always been in me to come out.

Carrón: I want us to understand whether it was just an instinctive reaction to your powerlessness, or if it was something else. Why, suddenly, from within your feeling of powerlessness, just as you seemed to be expecting nothing, did the certainty that God was embracing you emerge? If you do not come to see what has happened to you, if you do not grasp the full scope of the experience you have had, tomorrow you will find yourself defenseless again in the face of a different, unforeseen situation.

Is it reasonable to expect something? What makes this waiting reasonable, so that it is not simply a fleeting feeling that can be swept away tomorrow by some unexpected event? Do you understand the question?

Lali: Yes, I do. Probably what has happened to me since January, since my husband died, is that this event has radically changed my gaze, my way of seeing. Because, as our friend said at the beginning, the death of my husband was the beginning of an experience that caused me to almost run into the fact that I could embrace the Father's will.

Carrón: And what is this different way of looking?

Lali: I see it in the fact that I finally recognized how what happens in my life happens not because someone is punishing me because I did something wrong, but because Someone loves me and is with me in this tempest.

Carrón: But how do you know there is Someone who loves you? You cannot get by with just the affirmation—"Someone loves me"—you need to understand why a statement like that is reasonable.

Lali: Because, as I said, I had my friends there with me every day, and I received the answer through concrete faces.

Carrón: Why is the help your friends give not simply a kind of consolation, considering that they cannot give back to you what has been taken away?

Lali: Because it is something that responds to my heart. This experience of begging, of poverty, this being nothing in His presence shows me that there is something I am not doing myself, and that it doesn't depend on my thoughts, my actions, or my efforts. I would not be able to generate it.

“For an event such as death or illness to open wide our eyes is quite understandable. But it is not enough for a person to learn something; and if he does not learn, after a while he slides back into his old routine.”

Carrón: So, what is that “something?” If it's not something you do, if it's not something other people do, what is it? What it is? We need to come to the point of clearly identifying what this “something” is.

Lali: Christ who is near to me each day.

Carrón: How do you know?

Lali: I don't know how to express it... I know because of my dialogue with Him, because of a Presence when I wake up in the morning and understand that I am not alone, because of a hope that was not there before and now is. I understand that I can do nothing, but there is an Other who holds me together.

Carrón: What is the most obvious sign that there is “an Other who holds you together?” What is the most obvious sign that you see as soon as you wake up?

Lali: The fact that everything is resolved in a way even beyond what I could have expected.

Carrón: You still do not know how the morning will go, but as soon as

you wake up everything is already there!

Lali: Yes, because it is a love and a mercy. I don't know how to describe it, but in the morning, you wake up and know that you are not afraid, because your dad loves you.

Carrón: Let's take a good look at this. Faced with the challenges of living, each of us tests, or verifies, the path he has traveled. We all do this verification, not just those who are going through some misfortune, like the ones you shared with us, and are stripped of everything. Even now, at this moment, as we begin—at least here in Italy—to slowly return to our usual way of life, each of us will be able to see whether we have wasted the time of the pandemic or whether we have grown. You are now verifying whether what happened to you, and what you described—your husband's death, your mom's illness—made you grow, made you learn to have a gaze you



12

didn't have before. This is crucial. A Spanish friend sent me an article in *El País*, by Rosa Montero (see p. 4), in which the journalist writes about how she watched from the window in her neighborhood in Madrid the beginning of the return to life of so many people who were eagerly waiting to see their friends again, to go out to dinner, to enjoy things again. She saw them celebrating with an "insatiable hunger for happiness," with "so much desire to set the night on fire, to possess life." Then, she immediately asks herself, "How many people went to bed happy that morning at dawn...?" and "How many have fallen back into the human dissatisfaction, which we all know so well, and into that annoying inability to experience certain, tangible, simple reality?" She adds, "The pandemic should have taught us something... but I fear we will learn nothing." In today's press review, there is an interview with the Belarusian Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Aleksievich, which begins with her saying, "We will forget this time of the pandemic;" we will not remember it. "That is how man is made. He easily forgets all the evil that befalls him." And she uses the example of the fact that a new nuclear center has been built precisely in Belarus, the place hardest hit by the Chernobyl disaster. "That is how man is made. He forgets" (S. Aleksievich, "Il nostro futuro comincia adesso" ["Our Future Begins Now"], interview by R. Castelletti in *Robinson, la Repubblica*, May 29, 2021). It is analogous to the way the Spanish journalist thinks about the pandemic. We are made this way; we do not learn from what happens. Montero insists she has already seen it many times, for example in friends who have been diagnosed with cancer. When they find out, in the face of evidence that terrifies them, they "assure us that the disease has opened their eyes," which is to say opened wide their gaze—

the same thing that happened to you—and they reiterate that "if they overcome it, they will never again waste their time worrying about nonsense or stop appreciating the true value of life," what is essential to be able to live. Anyone, even the most distracted person, is pushed to open his gaze when a dramatic circumstance occurs. But then, the journalist adds, when those same friends "recover (thank goodness)... a few years later, they relapse into the same mental outrage, the same confusion about what they are and what they want." In other words, they go back to the same way of living and seeing things as they had before. This is the point. For an event such as death or illness to open wide our eyes is quite understandable. But it is not enough in order for a person to learn something; and if he does not learn, after a while he slides back into his old

routine. That's why I insisted on asking you what is that "something" you were talking about. Montero continues talking about herself: "And the same thing happens to me.... I have been writing on this subject for years, giving educated advice on the need to learn to live in the present," but "there is an abysmal difference between what you think and whether you assume that thought into your body," meaning that a thought permeates life and becomes mine. She continues, "It is difficult to live according to what you believe" (we would say the crucial issue is that of experience). So, what do we do? "Now I am here, like almost everyone else, unconsciously postponing happiness to a time that is always a little further away." We always put off our fulfillment a little further into the future, Montero underlines. And we "live this life as if we had another in our suitcase," she writes, quoting Hemingway. Then she adds that "we waste our days stupidly, postponing the full consciousness of living until another moment, as if the present were just a way station, a boring stage on our rough journey to who knows where. It is as if we are perpetually on the conveyor belt of an airport, passengers in eternal movement towards nowhere," each of us thinking, "I will be happy when I reach my destination." In other words, we would say, when I reach my destiny. "The bad news is," the journalist concludes, "that we never arrive. There is only today, the here and now."

If I have pushed you to clearly understand what you have experienced, it is because I do not want this to be the conclusion that we, too, reach in time: postponing happiness to the future, but in the end only fooling ourselves that we will reach it, because in reality there is only today, the here and now.

Starting with what you said before, how would you respond to this reporter who had the guts to write something like that? We can say that 90% of her story is like yours: you too were provoked, questioned, and at first you thought it was better not to expect anything so you wouldn't be disappointed. In those moments, in the face of great sadness when your husband died and when your mother got sick, you tested the solidity of the journey you've travelled. Do you have anything in your experience that can contradict what this journalist says? Life now is so global that Madrid dialogues with Kharkov and Kharkov responds to Madrid.

Lali: *First of all, the fact is that I lived as I described: in the beginning, it was me, with my plans, but then something happened. And I ask and pray that I never forget what happened. The difference is that now I am attentive to reality and not to my plans.*

Carrón: So, what is the difference in the present? I repeat the question. Just now, between us, something happened, and whoever intervenes now must be in dialogue with what emerged from what happened. This is how we test whether we have gained something during the pandemic, or whether we have wasted the opportunity and still need to learn.

Thiry: *Can you help clarify the question?*

Carrón: The issue is understanding what our friend has introduced with her story: a new factor, which is decisive in responding to the Spanish journalist. How can we say, in a way that is not pietistic, "God is embracing me now?" The way we say these things is often pietistic and does not respond to the real challenges that we have, so in the end we do not know what to say.

Miko: *I am from Azerbaijan, and I still have just one question, starting from the pandemic. For those of us who have faith, who are believers, it is easy to understand the existence of hope. But we are not alone here; we have a people all around us, the people we love, our friends. And because of COVID, the people around us lost their jobs; they lost their loved ones; they are stressed. We cannot easily explain the existence of hope to them, because either they do not believe or they have denied its existence. What method should we follow to better explain to them that there is hope?*

Carrón: This is "the" question! Since we have not become aware of the reason for hope, we do not know what to say to those who ask us this question. This is why, with our friend, I insisted upon the need to become aware of the reason for her hope and ours. Otherwise, we too will not be able to witness it to the world. It is not first of all a problem for others; it is our problem. The problem is our lack of self-awareness. So I thank you, because you have emphasized the question even more. We still need to find the beginnings of an answer.

Julja: *I'm from Almaty. While I was listening to what Lali said, and as you challenged her, I, too, asked myself what helps me to live in dramatic moments and in daily life... In the face*

of what are usually the most burning questions in life, what is the most obvious sign that Christ is present and helps me? Christ is not, in fact, something abstract. I would say you are that sign, you who have me walk a certain journey within the Movement. The way you help me do it is also important: not consoling me in difficult moments, but challenging me without offering shortcuts, without letting me off easy.

Carrón: I'll do the same today!

Julja: I know that.

Carrón: Don't think I will be the one who can answer your questions. I limit myself to helping you, by provoking your reason and your freedom in the face of life's challenges of living. Often, in fact, we follow the same trajectory the Spanish journalist or our friend described. All of us, in certain moments, open our eyes again and say, "Finally, I have changed the way I look at things!" but we can only be really sure of this if we fully realize what has happened to us. Giussani always told us—and I'll never give up emphasizing this!—that trying certain things does not constitute experience. We all try things, right? Those who are diagnosed with a tumor try certain things and say, "I won't waste any more time!" But, after the disease, it's back to the same old routine. The only way you can keep from reverting, I am telling you, is if you have grown in self-awareness, if you have committed yourself to judging what you tried. So, let's get back to the point: what is this difference of gaze that we talked about? Otherwise, we repeat certain phrases, but without really understanding what we are talking about.

Julja: In my life, and in the steady journey that I am walking, which is School of Community...

Carrón: I agree, School of Community. But you cannot get by just saying that. What is the step of awareness that the School of Community has helped you to take? Otherwise, it would be like going to school without understanding what we are being told. Leave the question open, and in the end compare the answer you would have given with the one that will emerge. There is no benefit in guessing the right answer "by chance." The fundamental issue is, first of all, that we are attentive and serious with the questions, so that we might grasp answers that are truly sufficient.

Darina: I am a teacher. At the Exercises, you invited us to become aware of what happened to us this year. During this period, thanks to the path you proposed to us and to the friends who, though they do not live near me, still accompany me on this road, I discovered something very great. Following a long path, I have come to understand that I want to live the fullness that I have encountered, but it is not simple. Your questions, however, teach me to look at life and at myself in a way that is true.

Carrón: Explain this thoroughly.

Darina: It's true, because what you propose is to look at myself, but in a way that is totally different from how I used to live and how others propose that I look at myself. Let me give an example to show where the difficulty lies. When you asked if we have hope, I was ready to shout, "Yes! Of course I have hope! Our hope is Christ." But when I ran into real life challenges, I realized that it

was not enough to say that. So, after the events that happened in Kazan—where a 19-year-old boy walked into a school and shot and killed students and teachers—my pupils, who are the same age as the kids who were killed, came to me and asked, "How do we go on living? We are afraid." In that moment, I realized as never before that simply repeating the words, "Christ is my hope" is not enough to be able to look my students in the eye without fear; I need to live with His presence in every moment. This is a great challenge for me, because He calls me to look at everything head-on, even when I, out of fear when faced with circumstances or responsibilities, would rather distract myself. My daily struggle is that I don't want to lose that newness of life that I have discovered, but I see that I am often afraid to respond. What can help me to overcome this fear?

Carrón: This is what I would never spare you: you having to stay in front of your questions! Never, ever! And I would not allow you—because it is life itself that does not allow you—to say "Christ is our hope" as if it were merely words, because words are not enough to help you live. We can "know the right words," but when what you described of the middle school children killed in Kazan happens, it is as if they do not carry the density of reality to engage with your students. And then we have nothing to offer them because we have nothing to offer ourselves. The only way to communicate something to others is to be serious, as you said very well, with ourselves, with our questions. It doesn't matter if it takes us time to understand. The fact is, reality does not allow us to content ourselves: when you find yourself in



© Luca Fiore

front of the children killed in Kazan, words are not enough. You might get angry because, after years of being in the Movement, you are still not able to remain standing in the face of a situation like that. But I say it's a good thing you realize this, so that you can walk a path that will allow you to confront it and offer your students something useful for their journey. I do not push you to see whether you live up to the test or not, but rather to collaborate with you in the seriousness you all have in looking at yourselves. The ones who are most critical are not your students; we ourselves should be the most critical, in that we do not accept a response that does not live up to the level of our reason. As Giussani emphasizes, we cannot utter phrases that our reason has not illuminated—it would not be worthy of ourselves, or of the faith. “*Drinking in things or affirming things without our reason having illuminated them [thereby showing they are reasonable]... is unworthy of our friendship, and it is unworthy of the world’s history*” (L. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Vol. 2: Hope*, MQUP, Montreal 2008, p. 104).

Now, considering that the time we have is almost up, I will seek to give a response: it’s enough for me that we come to see the point at hand today. The crucial question is the one posed by Lali. We have to help each other to understand what is critical to being able to “respond” to the Spanish journalist. “There is only today, the here and now,” she writes. This has to be our point of departure. What she does not realize is that her reason would not perceive a problem (“I will be happy when I reach my destination” but “the bad news is, you never arrive. There is only today, the here and now”) if not for the fact that the “today, the here and now” calls for, testifies to the presence of an Other. The problem, in fact, is not offering an explanation for death or for suffering.

“The” question is, above all, giving reasons for life. From the time you wake up in the morning, you have to have some explanation for your being here, for your life, for your existence—today, here and now. Why did our friend, at a certain point, realize that God was embracing her? Not because of a thought or extemporaneous emotion, but because she is not giving herself life today, here and now, as is evident from the moment she wakes up in the morning: life is given to her. Since waking up is so often automatic for us, we do not realize that precisely the today, the here and now of our life and existence, cries out that there is One who is giving us life. We have all read the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* and are amazed at the things written there, but it is as if repeating Fr. Giussani’s affirmation, “I am *you-who-make-me*” (*The Religious Sense*, p. 105) were, in the end, a pietistic ex-

“We do not realize that precisely the today, the here and now of our life and existence, cries out that there is One who is giving us life. I can have hope in the future because right now there is One who is embracing my life and yours.”

ercise. Consequently, when we find ourselves in front of a journalist who declares that happiness or destiny do not exist, and that all we have is today, the here and now, it seems like “game over” to us. No! This is where everything begins. If we, however, despite the education that Giussani gave us, do not realize it, if we do not become aware of it, terror invades us. “What does God want from me?” our friend asked. But then something happens: “God is embracing me.” We have to understand that this is not a feeling—“I feel that God is embracing me”—but rather an act of reason—“I recognize that God is embracing me so that I exist today, here and now. Because of this, I have a different perception of myself and of reality.” If our companionship doesn’t bring us to this point, in which we realize the ultimate meaning of reality, we are not friends. The greatest friend we have—his name is Fr. Giussani—gave us the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* precisely to accompany us. How? By introducing us to the one companionship that allows us to look at everything with positivity, introducing us to recognizing what is ultimately at the foundation of reality,

“a meaning which is further on” (L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 109), as he says at the end of the chapter. Only a person who becomes aware of the companionship of the One who is making him today, here and now, “can enter any situation whatsoever,” can face even the death of her husband and the sickness of her mother, “profoundly tranquil, with a promise of peace and joy” (*The Religious Sense*, p. 106). Go read the chapter again. The greatest answer we can give to these challenges is already present in reality, not in putting things off to the future. I can have hope in the future because right now there is One who is embracing my life and yours, who also embraces your husband’s life, and the lives of the victims of the cable car crash here in Italy the same day things opened up again.

It amazes me how this gaze on reality is what strikes other people the most. Recently, the Spanish writer González Sainz wrote a book that captures that instant of wonder in front of what exists. It speaks of the “wonder of the present,” which opens us to the recognition of the ultimate consistency of life and triggers our expectation for something to come

and give meaning to it all. His exact words are, “The world grows and creates itself until the point of us being able to look at it with wonder. I am magnetized by the wonder of existing, placed before all that exists, by the communion of existence. That magnetization was already a prayer that something come to us from another kingdom and realize this desire for meaning” (J.Á. González Sainz, *La vida pequeña* [*The Small Life*], Editorial Anagrama, Barcelona 2021, p. 66).

The wonder of the present is what our friend described, speaking of waking up in the morning; this is “the wonder of existing, placed before all that exists.” The answer to today’s question is wonder: we are in awe, in a conscious and not a sentimental way, therefore with all the fullness of our reason, at all that exists. This is what allows us to look properly at reality without considering it as something obvious. Most of the time, as the Spanish journalist writes, we take it for granted. Not taking it for granted means having the gaze Fr. Giussani introduced to us in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*. So, our friend is right; the answer is that “God is embracing me now” and we have to fully understand what we are saying: “God is embracing me now, because He is causing me to exist now.” Otherwise, we will easily go back to the old routine tomorrow.

In front of the challenges we find ourselves facing, it is as if we are forced to take the test of what we have learned this year during the lockdown, of whether or not we have learned to look at today, the here and now, with depth, with that look of reason we’ve been talking about. Otherwise, we

will merely stick these affirmations, no matter how correct, on top of our rationalist point of view, and then perceive how inadequate they are in coping with the urgency that our teenagers have after a tragedy like the one in Kazan. The question is whether, when faced with their question—“How do we go on living? We are afraid!”—she holds a card that can challenge them, that can place before their eyes the fact that they exist and that can help them to understand what it means to exist. This means introducing them to the recognition of the One who is giving them life right now. This is the only way they can go on living, without censoring anything, and look with hope at even the death of their friends.

If we do not walk this journey of awareness, if we do not find an answer for ourselves, we cannot put into play those answers we give ourselves “in mere words” in reality, because they do not convince us first, before anyone else.

This is the Movement, this is why Fr. Giussani started the Movement, as I said: to demonstrate the relevance of faith to the needs of life, to the needs of our reason! All that happens, then, is part of the journey that the Mystery allows us to walk so that the experience of faith might become more and more ours, and so that we can see whether or not what we have received, the education to which we are invited, is credible. It is only growing in awareness that allows us to look at everything in a true way, to the point of using our reason to recognize the Mystery within reality, the Mystery that we call God, who is embracing our being. “With age-

old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you” (Jer 31:3). Just think how it would be to wake up every morning without taking today, the here and now, for granted; to be full of wonder because we exist and because, today too, He has had pity on our nothingness and causes us to exist! “Only in the discovery of Being as love which gives of Itself continually is solitude eliminated. Existence is realized, in substance, as dialogue with the Great Presence which constitutes it—it is an inseparable companion. The company is in our ‘I.’ ... Every human friendship is the reverberation of the original structure of being” (*At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, MQUP, Montreal 1998, p. 90). The companionship is in the “I.” And if our companionship is not to help us understand the companionship that is in our “I,” then it is not enough, because we are not the ones, not even all of us together, who can defy death. Therefore, when a person moves to a place away from everyone else, she will see whether belonging to the Movement helped her to learn that the companionship is in our “I,” and that she can recognize it from the moment she wakes up in the morning, and not because she has 500 friends around. I ask myself, “How many people here in Milan, with 500 friends around them, wake up every morning with the awareness we are talking about?” You can’t take it for granted. In contrast, a person can seem to be totally alone, in the midst of the Siberian tundra or in Kazakhstan, and wake up with this awareness. This is how we verify the education of the Movement.

Thiry: *I have heard from some of my friends that this self-awareness you speak of is not enough, and they ask themselves what will become of the Movement and the Catholic Church in Russia. What keeps what you’re saying now from being a mere selfish looking-inward?*

Carrón: The road of self-awareness is not at all a selfish looking-inward and is the only road that truly changes history. What Giussani taught us is that a person can get up in the morning, as our friend said, with the awareness that God is embracing him now. If this awareness has not entered us even after “centuries” of the Movement, neither will it enter us thanks to changes in the situation of the Church, of politics, or of society. The question is the seriousness with which each person makes the proposal of the Movement his own. And the Movement is not an organization: the Movement is a life! You can see how decisive the self-awareness we are describing is when fundamental questions emerge. In the face of them, the path that a person has walked comes to light. If we walk this path proposed by the Movement, we will begin to verify for ourselves whether it is a selfish looking-inward. And if we don’t want to walk, we will see the consequence of that with our own eyes, too. You can’t live imagining what the Movement will be like a few years from now. If I can’t live now, if our friend can’t live now, after her husband has died, with a new self-awareness, we will end up as Rosa Montero says in *El País*: we postpone happiness to who knows when or where and, in the end, what wins out is the bad news that it never comes. ■