

Meeting 2020

Where does hope originate?

The full text of the conversation between Bernhard Scholz, president of the Rimini Meeting, and Fr. Julián Carrón, the head of CL, during the special edition (August 20, 2020)

Bernhard Scholz. Welcome to this conversation with Fr. Julián Carrón, president of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. Thank you, Fr. Carrón, for being here with us this evening.

Where does hope originate from? This question is at the intersection of many questions that have emerged in this dramatic moment of our history: “How can I have hope? What is the difference between hope and optimism? Where does our capacity for hope originate?” These are the questions we will address in this evening’s conversation. We will begin with a question related to your e-book that came out during the lockdown, *Reawakening Our Humanity* (J. Carrón, *Reawakening Our Humanity: Reflections from a Dizzying Time*, 2020, available in English at clonline.org). How can we talk about a “reawakening” at a time so full of limitations and restrictions that forced us to stay home, not going to work or to school?

Julián Carrón. I believe that the event in which we are participating is an example of the reawakening of our humanity. In the midst of this situation, who would have dreamed that we could have a Meeting on such a scale, with participation by 120 town squares throughout the world and an unthinkable creativity? This is just one example, but it shows that, in facing a crisis with openness to the provocation it is for our life, we can see a reawakening of our creativity and capacity to commit our energies that has surprised many people. It is a reawakening that comes not—as we sometimes think—*despite* the difficulties, but precisely *because* there are difficulties, which force us to seek out alternate roads and possibilities, to utilize hidden resources that would otherwise remain buried. Many of the innovations we have seen with this Meeting—that we see now and will see in the future—came about because of the provocation of the last few months, without which they may have taken years to develop. I begin with the Meeting, because the most concrete way to respond to your question is with an example. Against all odds, the reawakening is happening right in front of us.

Scholz. To speak about hope, we will begin with an observation from daily life. Not a day—not an hour—goes by without us saying, “I hope ‘x’ will happen”; “I hope ‘y’ goes well”; or “I hope ‘z’ doesn’t happen.” All of the occurrences and undertakings in our lives have been permeated and transformed by keeping an eye on the future: we hope something good will happen or something bad will not happen. I ask, Could you say that hope is a constant in our lives?

Carrón. Of course. Pavese expressed it in words that are imprinted in our memory: “Has anyone ever promised us anything? Then why should we expect anything?” (C. Pavese, *This Business of Living*, Transaction Publishers, 1964, p. 267). The genius of Pavese—I have always been struck by this—is the way he grasped how hope and expectation are a structural part of humanity, of his humanity and so also of ours, of each person’s humanity. They belong to our human nature. We hope and we wait in expectation because these actions are constitutive of our being human. Questions arise, however, when reality relentlessly challenges the hope in us that we could call “natural.” When circumstances are difficult, contradictory, the solidity of our hope is put to the test. “If a discordant / note assails the ear,” Leopardi wrote, “that heaven turns to nothing in an instant” (G. Leopardi, “On the Portrait of a Beautiful Woman,” in *Canti: Poems, A Bilingual Edition* vv. 47-49, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2010, p. 257).

Scholz. In that light, what is the difference between hope and optimism?

Carrón. Optimism is the psychological disposition that looks on the bright side of reality, saying everything will be fine to the point of putting blinders on. It is somewhat fleeting: if the weather changes and a storm rolls in, it's all over. In *Candide*, Voltaire, mocking that kind of optimism, responds to the question, "What is this optimism?" by saying "Alas! [...] it is the madness of maintaining that everything is best when it is worst" (F. Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism*, chap. 19, Penguin Classics, London 1950). "Optimism is a substitute for hope" (G. Bernanos, *The Last Essays*, Cluny Media, Providence, 2019, p. 3). Why? The reason is simple: optimism lacks the solidity to be able to hold up against things that happen, against life's contradictions. Therefore, when a difficulty proves greater than our efforts, this substitute for hope goes up in flames.

This is what we have all seen when Covid backed us into a corner, sending us to confront the risk on the front lines or, in the best of cases, staying at home, forced to invent new ways to get through daily life. We discovered whether our hope was a mere optimism that was not worth the effort, or whether it was enough to allow us to face the difficulty of the circumstances with dignity.

Scholz. Another experience we often have is that when we find ourselves in challenging situations that we are not able to resolve, we go into a kind of holding pattern, waiting for it to pass. In the meantime, however, we are not really living. We are consumed by hoping that the difficulty—whether illness or some other discomfort—will pass as soon as possible. Is there a way to, instead, live moments like these with hope, being present to and aware of ourselves?

Carrón. Everything depends on whether we have firm ground to build our life upon. Hope, in fact, must have reasons at its foundation. When we are challenged outside the boundaries of our routines, of what we already know, of our own measure, our abilities, and our efforts and attempts, we can see whether we stand on ground firm enough to face all that happens with a positive outlook. If that is missing, we can only wait for the tempest to pass; we cannot remain standing when confronted by reality's provocations and we turn and hide our faces. Not only does this not resolve the problem, but it makes it even worse. Just imagine a person who, during the time he had staying at home, lived like someone just waiting for it all to pass! What a struggle to get out of bed every morning and wait for another day, and yet another day, to pass! Doing this would not only make the situation even more unbearable, but you would miss the opportunity to learn something new that every circumstance, no matter what it is, brings with it. To take advantage of it, all you need is to be open to what happens. You may even see something: the birth of some initiative or action that you never would have predicted. We may surprise ourselves in action doing something we never would have thought possible. Think how many times in the last few months we, by staying open, discovered something unexpected or learned something about ourselves or about others we never thought existed! In this regard, I have always been amazed by this verse from Montale: "An unexpected / is our only hope" (E. Montale, "Prima del viaggio [Before the journey]," vv. 26-27, from "Satura," in *Tutte le Poesie [Complete poetry]*, Mondadori, Milano, 1990, p. 390).

Scholz. You speak of "firm ground." What is that firm ground that allows us to hope even when reality does not correspond to our expectations? How can we keep ourselves from being taken in by false hopes and instead identify the hope that can make us truly ourselves, even in situations we never would have chosen?

Carrón. Each of us has to look at what truly makes us ourselves. And you cannot figure it in an abstract way—you have to measure yourself against life's provocations. It is in that moment, when we are thrown into narrow straits, that each of us tests the journey we have made so far. This is why an impact with reality is essential. As Fr. Giussani said, a person who has been spared the toil of living will have a weaker experience of the resonance of his reason, his creativity and capacity for understanding: "If an individual were to barely live the impact with reality, because, for example, he had not had to struggle, he would scarcely possess a sense of his own consciousness, would be less aware of his reason's energy and vibration" (L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 1997, p. 97). Those who, instead, have been pulled out of their shell

in many ways will be more capable of understanding themselves and what helps them to live. Discovering this “firm ground” is a very human journey. It requires an awareness and comprehension of what happens to us. Those who, for example, traveled a journey in the midst of the difficulties of these past months will have been surprised to discover a newness in the way they face reality, in going back to work and regular relationships with other people. They will experience a wonder at the existence of reality and of relationships that was not there before, and find themselves doing their job in a new way. Those who did not walk that journey, did not learn from what happened, soon find themselves back in their old rut. A doctor, who was speechless at seeing so many of his colleagues diving into their work, not holding back anything in those most dramatic moments in the hospitals, said to me, “I was completely deflated because, just a few weeks after the end of the crisis, we hardly said hello to one another.” How can it be that such an intense experience doesn’t even leave a trace? It depends on the journey each person has made, on the growth of awareness of what has happened to him or her. If a person does not hold on to what he experienced once the crisis has ended goes back to square one without having learned anything, without having discovered something that can help him or her face the future. In this situation, life slips by without making us grow as persons, without making us more solid and nurturing our self-awareness. I think that a saying of Eliot is perfect for this: “Where is the Life we have lost in living?” (T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from “The Rock,”* Harcourt, New York, 1934, p. 7). We can lose life in living, or we can gain it. We do not gain it by sparing ourselves an impact with reality, and we do not lose it just because reality puts us to the test. We gain it when we accept the provocation of our circumstances, no matter what they are, and are the protagonists in every situation.

Scholz. What allows us to be protagonists in *this* situation?

Carrón. Here we come to the big question that each of us—I repeat—has to address for himself. I have often offered this example to my students, to show them where hope originates. Imagine you have a person who is very dear to you who is sick and they still have not found a way to treat the disease. If, one day, watching TV or reading the newspaper, you come to find out about a person somewhere in the world who had the same illness and was healed, even if the person you care about is still sick and has not gotten the medicine yet, you face the future completely differently, you look at it differently. Hope begins to manifest itself when something happens in the present to make a new outlook on the future possible. And this is what we see happen over and over again. In *The Radiance in Your Eyes: What Saves Us from Nothingness*, (J. Carrón, *Il brillio degli occhi: Che cosa ci strappa dal nulla*, Editrice Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2020; in English at clonline.com), I cited a letter from a person who, at age 50, no longer expected anything new out of life. One day, through his children’s school, he met a parent like himself, but who had a radiance in his eyes, which disclosed a vibrant intensity he no longer saw in himself. He started to spend time with the other dad, following him and observing how he lived, until his gaze on reality became his own.

Hope is born when we see something happen in the present that opens us up. We think the game is over, that there is nothing left to hope for, but instead everything begins again. It is precisely there, not in another place, or much later, or earlier, or in our imagination; it is right there, in the situation we are living, that something happens that reignites our hope, that opens up life’s future to something different. This is why Fr. Giussani used to say, very synthetically, “Hope is a certainty in the future based on something real in the present” (L. Giussani, text from the Communion and Liberation 1996 Easter Poster). It may be that nothing changes right away, but what is important is seeing people who face a situation like our own in a new way. “If what they are living can become mine, I too can look adversity in the face, can look at the difficulties of life with eyes full of hope.”

Scholz. Is the presence you are describing just any presence, or a particular presence?

Carrón. It is not just any presence. Because not every presence is capable of being the foundation of hope, of helping us remain standing in the face of reality’s challenges. When a trial is especially difficult—we can think of

illness or that final frontier, death, or the mundane that “cripples us” (C. Pavese, *Dialogues with Leucò*, Eridanos Press, New York, 1989, p. 195), which is sometimes the hardest part of life—the question is: What kind of event must happen to us, what kind of presence must enter our lives, to allow us to live that trial with hope? Each of us must ask ourselves, Have I encountered a presence like this?

The disciples had stumbled upon a presence—Jesus of Nazareth—whose strength allowed them, whether in everyday life or in the midst of a storm, not to simply wait for things to pass, giving each other good advice, but to face everything, even the storm, in a different, truer, and more human way. They saw how Jesus faced illness, death, difficulties, and contradictions. They saw him come to a bad end and laid him in the tomb. But then they saw Him alive, risen. Anyone with that presence in his eyes could not help but say, as St. Paul did, “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (Rm 8:38–39).

I have often asked my students—who have taught me a great deal because they are constantly pushing me to give reasons for things—“Do you think that your mother loves you?” “Of course.” “Are you certain?” “Very certain.” “All right, if you are so certain, could you imagine that there could be any time, because of anything that happens in life, that your mom could stop loving you?” “No, absolutely not!” they reply. Why? What was the foundation of that certainty in the future? A present experience. Because of the experience living together with her, they could not imagine that her love for them could fail. The simplicity of the experience of that relationship, which belongs to everyone, is identical to what the disciples experienced with the exceptional presence of Jesus, but with one difference: my mother cannot free me from death or sickness; she can only accompany me, but the disciples had stumbled across a presence who introduced into history a hope that, as St. Paul says, does not disappoint. “Hope does not disappoint” (Rm 5:5), no matter the situation one finds himself in.

This tells us, then, that the problem with our hope is our faith. Do we have, in terms of the presence of Christ we have encountered, the same certainty a child has about his mother’s presence? Do we have a certainty about His presence so human, so true, so rooted in the depths of our “I,” that when we are with Him we can look with hope at anything that happens to us? Do we have the certainty that, whatever happens, no one will be able to separate us from this presence?

If there is no presence that loves me so much that, whatever I do, whatever happens, I can look to the future with indestructible positivity, because of my certainty in that presence, because of my lived experience in relationship with that Presence, then in the end, hope turns out to be an empty word. We can spin it however we want, but if there is no historical presence of a man who rose from the dead, and so is really present, really contemporary in our lives, hope will always have an expiration date.

Christ, God made man, who died and rose again and is present here and now in a human reality, is the origin of our hope. And we encounter Christ today, as our friend Mikel Azurmendi did in a witness he shared in the video we saw two days ago. He intercepted him in people, in flesh and blood, first of all in listening to a certain journalist on the radio as he was in critical condition in the hospital; he noticed something different in the way he spoke about current events. He later found another person who looked at him in a way that was incomparably human, and then another, and yet another. Observing the completely human way all of those people lived daily reality attracted him, filled him with admiration, and challenged him at a deep level (Cf. M. Azurmendi, *L’Abbraccio: Verso una cultura dell’incontro [The embrace: toward a culture of encounter]*, BUR, Milano, 2020). At a certain point, he realized that these people were all generated by the same encounter, that they acknowledged the same presence. Through this, he discovered that Christ—the presence we Christians speak about—is real, is risen, meaning that he continues to be present in history through a human difference Azurmendi came across. Christ was able to budge a person like him, who had lost touch with the faith 50 or 60 years ago, enabling him to rediscover life in all its intensity. When you see things like this, you cannot help being struck by the fact that the same story that began two thousand years ago continues to happen in the present.

Scholz. So the ability to stick with and face any situation is proof that you have a hope that does not

disappoint. And by engaging with our circumstances, even difficult ones, is our hope strengthened and confirmed?

Carrón. Absolutely! Because the more you are faced with difficulties, the more you test; that is, verify, the solidity of your hope. Some might say, “These are all abstract points.” No. Why not? Because—first point— what Mikel Azurmendi and our friend, who at fifty thought he couldn’t expect anything except to see life slipping away, came across were people: flesh and blood, who one can encounter in the world, in real life, and who challenge our skepticism, our measure, and our resignation. Only something real, something present, can restore our hope, not an idea or an abstraction. None of that helps. We saw this when faced with the fear of coronavirus, just as we have when faced with other situations. We need an incarnate, historical reality whose very existence amazes us to rekindle our hope. They are presences that embody an adequate meaning, a promise for our life. As Benedict XVI said, the most important ideas in life became flesh and blood: “The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism” (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 12). In other words, what we need are not abstract values, but rather people who live out hope in their persons, something that then fascinates and challenges us.

So, it is not an abstraction at all, but rather something real that—second point—generates a new subject in history. It is people like those Azurmendi and our 50-year-old friend describe, who, if one truly follows their lead, if one agrees to follow them with simplicity, just like the disciples agreed to follow Jesus, become instruments to generate a new kind of subject, one who can remain standing against an impact with reality. Not because they are heroes—as we often think, reducing Christianity to moralism—but because they were, and still are, in turn generated by that same event, that same presence, though encounters with others who came before them. A relationship with the living Christ, present here and now, generates a new subject in history, one who walks with hope. Those who encounter Him and let themselves be taken hold of, as St. Paul says, become upright men, present to themselves and not shying away from reality. Confronting reality, no matter how it manifests itself, is in fact for such people an opportunity to verify the solidity of their hope.

For me, the time of confinement at home was a wonderful opportunity to ask myself, Is what I live, what I believe in, what I have placed my trust in solid enough to bear me through this circumstance? Each of us has to ask ourselves these questions, or else it will be hard for us to remain standing in front of any situation that is beyond our own measure. This is the decisive contribution we Christians can make to today’s society. Many are surprised that we held the Meeting this year. It is our first public gesture since the lockdown, and many thought it wouldn’t be possible. How was it possible? Because there are people who do not give up in the face of difficulties, who do not throw in the towel because of fear, who perceive the provocation of reality. The Meeting happened because of the hope that distinguishes us: not because of our merits, let it be clear, but because of the grace that happened to us and that we want to communicate to everyone.

Scholz. I would like to focus for a moment on the fact that hope is always lived out in a historical context. In public debates, we often speak, including in reference to the current situation, about the postwar period. If we go back and look at what happened during that time, we see that every effort expended through work or intellectual life improved the situation. There was continuous growth, supported in part by technological progress. Hope seemed, at least with regards to the material circumstances of life, automatic. Then, in 2008–11, for the first time there was a break. Continuous growth stopped, and we had to come to terms with the fact that our situation could get worse, that the standard of life we had achieved was not guaranteed, that our children’s future might not be better than ours, and it might be even worse. And that also changed—I would say—the way we look at that expectation we talked about at the beginning. So hope either became even more solid or it ended in resignation. On a related note, the other day I read an article that spoke about a “pandemic of despair” over the last decade (*Ilsole24ore.com*, August 16, 2020), referring to an increase in

cases of depression not as the result of clear pathological causes but as a sign of a mentality I would describe as one of resignation. Consequently, I would ask you how the historical context in which we live impacts our hope, the way we think of hope, especially in this time of pandemic? We are not, in fact, isolated; we live within a social and cultural context that affects, among other things, the way we conceive of ourselves and how we fit in the world.

Carrón. I think these events—the economic crisis and now the pandemic—have put our concept of hope, and above all our experience of putting faith in something, to the test. There was a break—as you said—in the faith we put in a constant, almost automatic progress in the realms of economics, medicine, etc. We saw that it was false. I have always kept in mind something Benedict XVI wrote about our mindset that every kind of progress is cumulative. But that is only valid in certain areas, let's say mechanical-scientific progress, but in all that is related to human life, a new beginning is always needed. "Incremental progress is only possible in the material sphere. (...) In the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man's freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew. These decisions can never simply be made for us in advance by others—if that were the case, we would no longer be free. Freedom presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person and every generation is a new beginning" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 24). We have seen this: as soon as trust is endangered, families start to save, they no longer invest, they are afraid of the future and only think about how to deal with their immediate circumstances. When this starts to happen, how can the cycle be broken? What you say about despair is an ever-lurking risk, because once you break trust you cannot just turn over a new leaf as if nothing had happened. Restoring confidence, after suspicion and distrust are introduced, takes time. This is why the kind of hope that we have is truly put to the test; we see whether we have firm ground to stand on, ground that does not leave us at the mercy of one crisis or another. We can only rise again from the ashes, no matter our situation, if our foundation rests on something more powerful than any crisis. Otherwise, a true "restart" is difficult. What we are living in these days together at the Rimini Meeting is a visible example of how it is possible to start again. And we can see many other new initiatives and evidences of creativity appear in Italy and all over the world that redeem us from our current situation. So let's keep our eyes open.

Our one problem is solidity. Our grandparents were tried even more than we have been, by wars and dramatic economic conditions, but they had the solidity that we often dream of. I am saying this not to focus on the past, but rather to underline the implications this question has for our children. We can only keep from injecting fear into their veins by having a hope to communicate to them. We often plant all our worries inside of them, instead of accompanying them to recognize the resources and potential they possess. This is where the future is played out, as Mario Draghi said in the inaugural address of the Meeting. If young people find adults who can accompany them in facing reality with a hypothesis of meaning, instead of inoculating them with fear, they will be able to grow and build, to work through the situations that arise. But it will take adults with a meaningful presence witnessing that it is always possible, not only *not* to shy away from reality, but to build, even in unpredictable situations laden with obstacles.

Scholz. Let's go deeper into this, an aspect of the problems which I think is decisive right now. In the face of an uncertain future, how should we look at our children?

Carrón. I think there are two ways in which parents can relate to their children, or educators to their students. On the one hand, there are those who try to spare them a relationship with reality, thinking they can defend them from the unexpected, from difficulties, from all the things they perceive as threats. It is as if they think of the world as one big threat from which an adult must protect children. In this way, even without realizing it, we communicate mistrust and suspicion. On the other hand, there are those families and educators who, rather than injecting fear into children, trying to spare them an impact with reality, introduce them to reality, slowly inviting them to take risks in the face of difficulties. They offer—

first and foremost by the way they live—a suggestion, a hypothesis, an initiative to be undertaken. In them, a young person sees people facing difficulties without giving up.

This is absolutely essential today: witnessing to young people—who are often, because they are young, easily frightened—the possibility of relating to problems, circumstances, and contradictions in a positive way; demonstrating that one can look to the future with a well-founded hope, not one overcome by fear or defined by difficulties that always exist. Communicating this—I am thinking of teachers—is also essential in the development of knowledge. To restore in young people the enthusiasm they need to learn, we have to communicate, through the way we teach, the hope we live, a kind of trust that allows them to draw forth all the resources they have, with a creativity that will surprise even us. The more you urge adolescents to take a position, the more you respect their potential, the more their inherent value will emerge, leaving us and them in awe. Often when I hear young people speak, I say to myself, “If these guys only realized the greatness of what they are saying, it would be a wonder for them!” Sometimes they don’t realize it, and our educational task lies in making them aware of everything that is contained in their experience, of the meaning of everything that they say, so that they can discover the firm ground that can support them on the road of life, that makes it possible not to give up, and look to the future full of hope. That is the path of education.

Scholz. And maybe one young person or another might even educate us by living with that direct simplicity.

Carrón. Absolutely! I learn a great deal from them. Often, their words and actions pass us by because of their characteristic lack of filter when relating to reality. Sometimes—as I mentioned—they do not realize the full weight of what they say, and I find myself repeating what I have heard and learned from them for years, while they themselves may have already forgotten. The problem is, to be able to hold onto and remember something, to learn from what is happening, you have to recognize its significance for your life.

Scholz. Historically, especially in modern times, Christianity has often been accused of diverting our attention from earthly life, from real problems, and consoling people with the afterlife. The claim is that this impedes the search for a more just society, trying to shape the world and make it a better home for man. Christianity, in short, as Marx said, is “the opiate of the people,” diverting people from engaging with reality. Certainly, this accusation is not so widespread today, but—I would ask—isn’t there a risk of living Christian hope as a compromise; that is, of withdrawing, creating a kind of pacified world, perhaps with a lowered standard of life, but in essence creating a bubble where life is more or less all right—when, in contrast, the hope you have described is a hope that leads to committing oneself, to taking risks, to creating and shaping reality? What is the difference between these two types of hope?

Carrón. You see it in the kind of Christianity a person lives! There is a kind of Christianity that is incapable of reawakening the person who encounters it, and therefore directs him to the afterlife, because he’s afraid of the here below. Then, there is a Christianity that awakens all of our humanity, all the capacity that exists within a person: all his energy, creativity, intelligence, and freedom, so the person is filled with a desire to get his hands dirty. This is a far cry from retreating to the afterlife! A Christianity that diverts us from reality is the opposite of true Christianity.

The issue is that so often we run the risk of living faith in a way that is not what Jesus introduced into history. In the beginning, everyone was amazed, not by a person who retreated from everything, but by one who related to everything in a new and different way, so much so that they said, “No one has ever spoken like this man; no one has ever acted like this man; we have never seen anyone like Him!” He did not think of the hereafter as a kind of waiting for everything to end; He was totally absorbed in whatever encounter he had, in whatever situation He entered, in whatever circumstance that provoked Him, and the way he looked at and treated people and things corresponded so much to the human heart that everyone went away

amazed. “We have never seen anything like this” (Mk 2:12). This is what Christianity is when it is Christianity, and if it is not this, it is not Christianity. It is not the Christianity entrusted to us in the Gospels. “You who have followed me [...] will receive a hundred times more here below” (Mt 19:29), Jesus said. In other words, those who follow Him will begin here below—here below!—to experience the hundredfold in everything: in a capacity for creativity and energy, a capacity to love and to entrust oneself, a capacity to walk in the midst of difficulties and to get up again after every kind of defeat, things that are usually impossible. A hundred times more humanity!

I don't know which Christians a person who makes such an accusation about Christianity must have met. But it is our responsibility to serve as counterexamples; if we do not witness that Christianity is not a superstructure added onto man's life from the outside, but rather an event that saves man and completes his elementary structure, which is to say his expectancy, his thirst for meaning and for fulfillment, it will be hard to interest anyone today in Christianity. A Christianity, however, that is capable of reawakening all of our humanity, of making it more and more attractive to get one's hands dirty, so that a person cannot wait to commit himself—because life is beautiful when it is spent for the good of others, the good of everyone—that is interesting! Only the presence of people who are a proof of that kind of intensity of life can make visible the contribution Christianity can offer man today. Our hope is a certainty that allows us to look to the future without escaping to the hereafter. The presence of Christ allows us to face any future, no matter how challenging, with certainty in our eyes. It is precisely what we see happening in the present that makes it possible for us to also hope in the hereafter.

Scholz. Let us go back one more time, at the end, to the initial question: Where does hope originate? Is it something we have to create ourselves, or is it a gift we receive?

Carrón. It is a gift we receive. As Montale said, “an unexpected [a gift] / is our only hope.” But it is a gift we can only receive by coming across a person; it doesn't fall from the sky. It is a gift a person can see, as John and Andrew did, receiving it by encountering a man, as did Mikel Azurmendi, who intercepted it listening to a journalist on the radio who spoke in a different way; or as a student might, who can be taken hold of in seeing a professor who takes a certain kind of interest in him; or as a sick person might, who discovers it encountering a doctor who relates to her in a different way. Only presences that are proof of “something beyond” that happened in their lives and generated them can be—whatever may happen—a factor that gives us hope, and then only if we are willing to let ourselves be struck and attracted by them, by what we see in them that corresponds to our desire for fulfillment. We are made for that fulfillment, not to try to limit our hunger and thirst for It.

Those who have found, through an encounter with a certain human reality, that which constantly reawakens them, and seeks to spend time with that certain presence who put them back on track because they need them to live, is truly walking a journey. This is the man who walks—as I said before—upright, standing tall in every circumstance.

Scholz. I think this evening was a gift that has reinforced and intensified our hope, at an eminently dramatic time that, without this hope, risks being merely tragic. If we live it with the hope Fr. Julián Carrón has witnessed to us, it can become a fruitful and creative time, which pushes us to embrace the opportunity this epochal change, spurred on by the pandemic, brings. If we look at “the radiance in our eyes,” as the title of his latest book, which just came out, says, our time will reveal unanticipated opportunities.

Thank you so much, Fr. Carrón!

Carrón. Thank you!

(notes reviewed by the author)

