

ANGELO COMASTRI

Where does happiness dwell? Please listen!

Foreword by Card. **Matteo Maria Zuppi**





Cardinal Angelo Comastri was born on September 17, 1943 in Sorano, Italy in the province of Grosseto (in the Diocese of Pitigliano-Sovana-Orbetello in Italy).

He was ordained a priest on March 11, 1967. In 1979 he was nominated parish priest of Porto Santo Stefano (Argentario).

On July 25, 1990, he was nominated Bishop of Massa Marittima-Piombino and on November 9, 1996, he was nominated Archbishop and Pontifical Delegate for the Shrine of Loreto. During Lent season of 2003, Pope John Paul II asked him to preach the spiritual exercises to the Roman Curia and On February 5, 2005, Pope John Paul II nominated him his Vicar General for Vatican City State and President of the Fabric of St. Peter as well as Coadjutor Archbishop of the Basilica of St. Peter.

Pope Benedict XVI invited him to prepare the texts for the Stations of the Cross for the Good Friday celebration at the Colosseum back in 2006. On October 31 of the same year the Pope nominated him Archpriest of the Basilica of St. Peter.

He was created and proclaimed Cardinal by Benedict XVI in the consistory of 24 November 2007.

On 21 February 2021, the Holy Father Francis accepted the resignation from his duties due to age limit. He is considered by all to be a great devotee of Our Lady.

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Translated by Rev. Fr. Benjamin Lewis Ng'ambi

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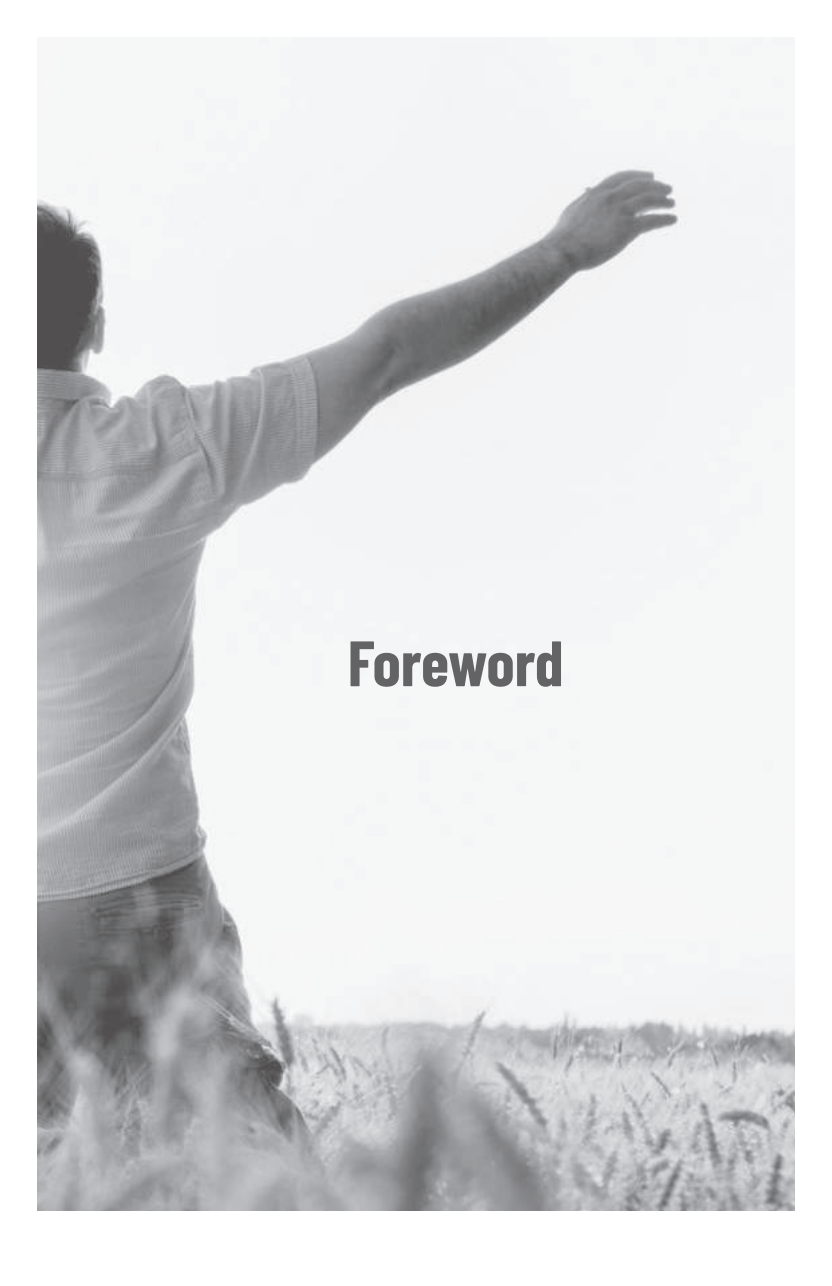
© Foundation of Religion Saints Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena, for the biblical texts

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A black and white photograph of a person from the waist up, seen from the side and back. They are wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved polo shirt and dark trousers. Their right arm is extended straight out towards the upper right corner of the frame, with the hand open and fingers slightly spread. The background is a bright, overexposed sky. The foreground is filled with out-of-focus stalks of grain, likely wheat or barley, which are slightly blurred, suggesting a shallow depth of field. The overall mood is one of openness and reaching towards the future.

Foreword

Every person tries to be happy. Unfortunately, people often look for happiness where they cannot find it: by taking, by possessing, by consuming. In this way, sadness grows, the bulimia of things and performances, which are never enough. Happiness, in fact, is not a passing state of mind, made up of superficial passions or imprisoned by addictions, nor is it linked to self-exaltation or determined by external factors. Happiness is chosen, otherwise it is merely fortuitous. Happiness is a strong and stable feeling, independent of the more or less beautiful living conditions.

Pope Francis insists on happiness, joy, *gaudium* and reminds us that even in the hard and difficult stages and circumstances of life, 'joy adapts and transforms itself, and always remains, at the

very least, like a glimmer of light, arising from the personal certainty of being infinitely loved, beyond everything' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 6). Joy, therefore, faces problems, it does not avoid them.

In other words, it is not only those who laugh that are happy. On the contrary. The Gospel warns us that the season of weeping will come. Jesus even proclaims blessed - that is, happy forever - those who mourn and, in this way, points us to true joy (*Mt 5:4*).

And that is how happy an old man with a heart full of goodness and love can also be, or a person who devotes his entire life to loving and serving the suffering and abandoned, or an intelligent and brilliant young woman, confined to a bed, having lost the use of all her senses, or a young father of a family, condemned to death for murder, but with a converted heart full of love!

Happiness is a door that always opens outwards! It does not possess but gives. Shared happiness is always more abundant for everyone.

Card. Comastri accompanies us, with his profound spiritual and human wisdom, to understand what it means to be truly happy, what the key to happiness is, where true joy dwells, the joy that does not fail, even in the face of illness, death and suffering.

Jesus wants our joy to be full and his to be in us. The Christian's happiness even goes so far as to overcome the greatest and ultimate evil, death. St Francis, a man full of joy, even though he suffered greatly, disarms death itself, calling it 'sister'. It must succumb and its punishment is defeated by the only weapon that conquers its fear: love.

In short, «where does happiness dwell?». It is not individual well-being, as so many products that we find on the ever-crowded counters of the super-market of individualism!

To find joy, we must follow the One who gives it to us. Only by walking with Jesus do we find the intimacy of our heart, because the heart can only be happy when it feels truly loved and is

not afraid to love, totally and unconditionally, as only God can do.

The author's greatest concern is young people, so that they are not deceived in their search for true joy. Christianity is the greatest novelty about God, because God himself came to tell us this novelty. "My joy be in you, and your joy be full," Jesus promises. Let us not be afraid of joy. Let us not allow joy to be stolen from us!

Here, then, is the path to follow: from the discovery of God's goodness, made present in the love and mercy of his Son Jesus for us, to the contemplation of the happy, love-filled lives of those who have allowed themselves to be taken and grasped totally by this love.

Happiness, then, is a demanding and intense journey from the Gospel to life, because a heart filled with God's love will surely transmit it, and a happy soul, because loved and pardoned, will bring happiness and love to others.

Let us be led by the experience of that spiritual master, Card. Comastri

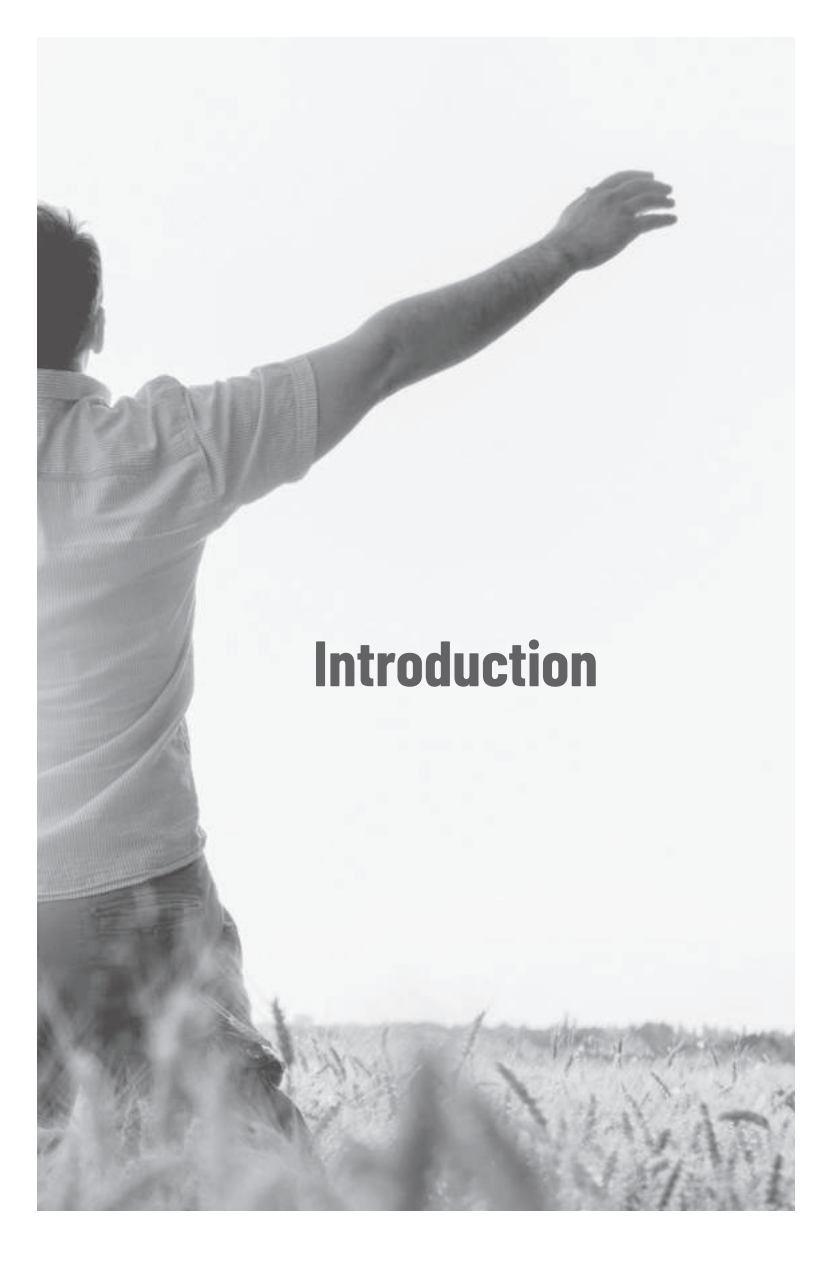
who opens our hearts, breaking the Word of the Gospel parables of mercy, those of the good man (*Lk 15:1-6*), the lost coin (*Lk 15:8-9*) and the merciful father (*Lk 15:11-32*). He helps us to get to know many witnesses of joy, who, precisely because they came into contact with God's love, were able to convey human and spiritual happiness to the end of their lives. And happiness without end is life with God. St John XXIII, Blessed Benedetta Bianchi Porro and Jacques Fresch, condemned to death for murder, help us on this path.

Thank you, dear Card. Comastri, for this is a simple and profound publication, capable of going to the source of the true happiness, to make us discover that, in reality, true happiness will flow from our breasts if we are filled with the Word of God and love for our neighbour.

✠ Matteo Maria Card. Zuppi

Archbishop of Bologna

President of the Italian Bishops' Conference

A black and white photograph of a person from the waist up, seen from the side and back. They are wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved polo shirt and dark trousers. Their right arm is extended upwards and outwards towards the sky. The background is a bright, overexposed sky. The foreground shows a field of tall grass or wheat, with some stalks in focus and others blurred. The overall mood is one of freedom and aspiration.

Introduction

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was always smiling: the joy in her heart shone through her face.

She often said: *«If you want your young people to be happy... don't multiply the entertainment but give them many opportunities to do good. Only doing good makes one happy! »*

The French writer Julien Green (1900-1998) left us this shocking statement: *«If you want to know where happiness does not dwell, go to places of amusement: there you will find a few crumbs of pleasure that pass quickly, but not even a shadow of happiness».*

Where, then, does happiness dwell?

Read these pages slowly and at the end you will say: «*Now I know where happiness dwells!*».

But beware: from this moment on, you must set out to go *where* happiness dwells.

Ask Our Lady for help: She sang the *Magnificat* and can teach you the notes of the *Magnificat*.

Trust her, because she has never let anyone down.

Opus car. Cant.



**Here is the Good News
brought by Jesus:
GOD IS LOVE!**

Ugo Spirito (1896-1979) was a sharp but also very tormented thinker in the last century.

One day he declared: *«I miss God, in the sense that I cannot give him a face that can satisfy me.*

That God exists is certain because there is a need of a Creator [a rose is enough to demolish an atheist: who put the flower's wonderful design in the seed? He did not put it there himself!]. But it is not enough for me, man, to have this certainty. I need to give God a face, to know who he really is.

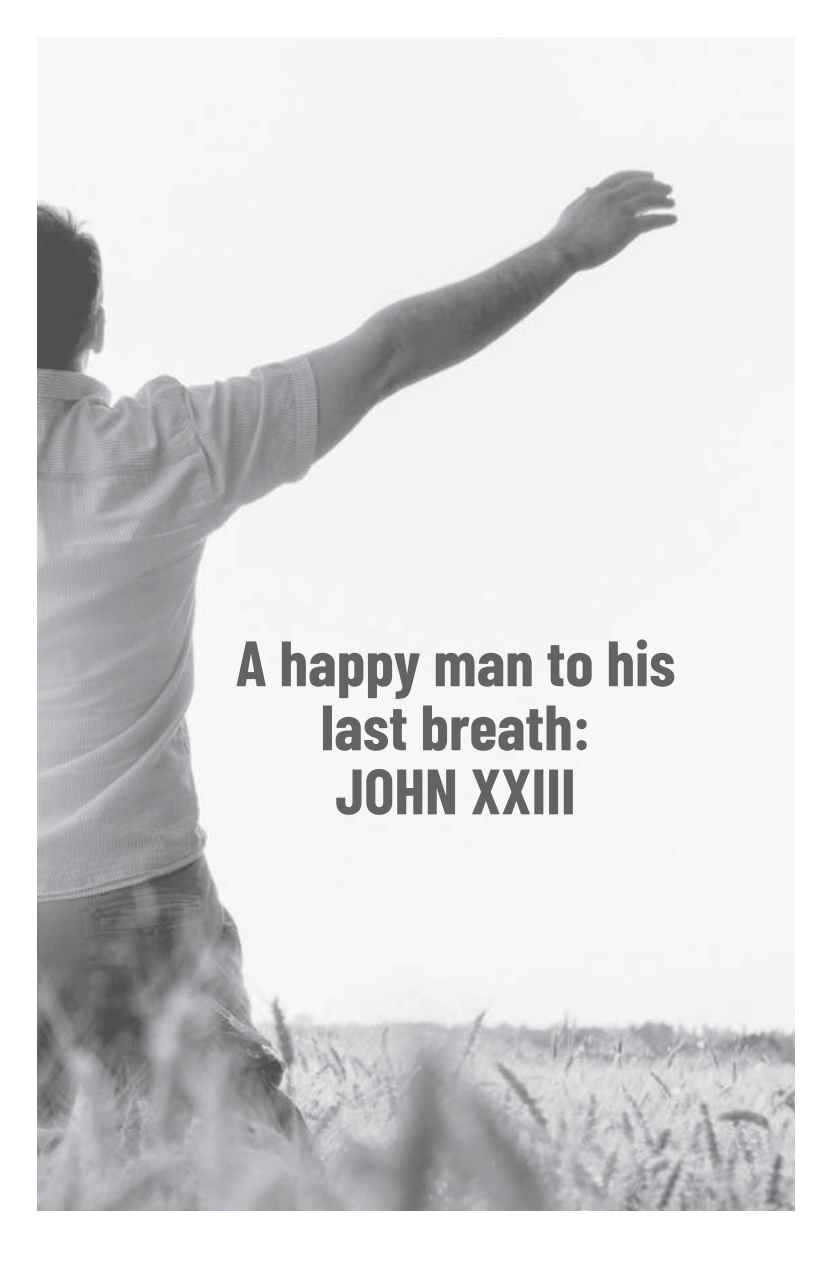
That is why I pursue it, questioning myself and the world. There is a question that

urges within me and to which I feel I must answer: who is God? It was precisely the urgency of this question that drove me to travel around countries and continents in search of an answer that would satisfy me. I did not find one, and so here I am, locked in the prison of my own problematicism. I do not know who God is».

Jesus, and only Jesus, reveals God to us, opens wide the entrance to his heart and introduces us into the consoling truth: God is Father! God loves you, God loves me, because God can only love: because God is Love! Huge affirmation!

All this has been revealed to us by Jesus. St Bernard rightly observes:

«If the Word [the Son of God] had not come among us, what idea of God could man have had but that of an idol, a figment of imagination? God would have remained incomprehensible and inaccessible, invisible, and utterly unimaginable. Instead, [God] wanted to be understood, wanted to be seen, wanted to be imagined. You will say: where and when does he make himself visible to

A black and white photograph of a man from the waist up, seen from the side and back. He is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved polo shirt and dark trousers. His right arm is extended upwards and outwards towards a bright, overexposed sky. The foreground is filled with out-of-focus stalks of grain, likely wheat or barley, suggesting he is standing in a field. The overall mood is one of peace and contemplation.

**A happy man to his
last breath:
JOHN XXIII**

I make a sapiential reading of the life of Pope John XXIII. That is, a reading that allows us to grasp in his life some message for our life today.

And I begin with a question. Why was Pope John XXIII so loved, even by those who were far from the Church? Why did he enter everyone's heart in such a short time?

His pontificate was the shortest in recent centuries (if we exclude the very short Pontificate of John Paul I): four years, seven months and seven days. Yet it was a Pontificate that left a deep mark on the life of the Church and the history of humanity.

François Mauriac, a few days after the death of John XXIII, wrote the following in the newspaper "La Croix": *«This great Pope was humble. The Holy Spirit found no hindrances in him and that is why it took only a few years of this pontificate for the Grace of God to open a breach that will last for centuries. Blessed be Pope John XXIII for blessing all men, for speaking to all as a loving father».*

And I would like to point out that Pope John was firm in doctrine and firm in discipline, but always with great goodness.

And, unheard of, seven years after his death, the Orthodox Metropolitan of Leningrad, Nikodim, presented his doctoral thesis at the Moscow Theological Academy on "John XXIII, Roman Pope" in 1970. Translated into Italian, the work was entitled "An uncomfortable optimist". It is impressive and clearly states how great the power of goodness is.

Italian television, on the occasion of John XXIII's death, collected the opin-

ions of four non-catholic observers who attended the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

Oscar Cullmann, a Protestant professor of New Testament exegesis at the University of Basel, said: *«Taking into account the fact that the very issue of the Pope's primacy separates us from Rome, it must be emphasized how wonderful it is that John XXIII found not only sincere admiration for his simplicity and great goodness, but also true love among non-catholic Christians throughout the world».*

The archpriest Vitalij Borovoj, of the Russian Orthodox Parish, for his part, testified: *«What Pope John did for the Catholic Church with the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, what he did for the rapprochement of all Christians with the détente between east and west, what he did for all mankind with his work for friendship and peace on this earth, all this will live forever».*

The American Protestant Douglas Horton recalled that *«conversing with him, even for a few minutes, one could notice how he was animated by love for each*

one of us. When he died, I felt like an old friend had died. I think I can say that he changed the course of history; and that will make him one of the great personalities of our time».

The prior of the ecumenical community of Taizé, Roger Schutz, who together with Max Thurian was received in audience by John XXIII on 13 October 1962, two days after the opening of the Second Vatican Council, said: *«On the eve and on the very day of Pope John's death, for the first time since the Reformation, after centuries of schism, the Protestant churches all over the world prayed for the Pope».* Today this may seem normal, but back then it was unheard of.

Who was Pope John XXIII?

We start with the conclusion of his life and then go on to discover the seed from which everything was born.

May 1963. News spreads around the world that Pope John XXIII is seriously ill. Everyone loved this extraordinarily

good man, everyone now looks to him with trepidation.

24 May. Pope John is in bed due to a sudden aggravation of his illness, which causes him continuous hemorrhages. As evening falls, he exclaims: *«I am here in obedience. I have my soul, my priesthood, the universal Church before me. I am at peace in the hands of God. Behold, the crucified Jesus invites me to stretch out my arms beside him, while Mary, our dear heavenly mother, encourages me...»*.

Nothing more than a simple, traditional... but convinced and lived faith.

30 May, 11.30 p.m. The Pope complains of a sudden sharp pain in the gastric region, accompanied by severe pain in the general condition. Prof. Mazzoni suggests that the tumour has been perforated and at the same time rules out the possibility of surgery.

John XXIII's hours are now numbered.

Professor Valdoni, who everyone knew was rather far from the faith, is also called. Pope John watched as he bent down to examine him and then gently whispered to him: «*Professor, while you worry about my body, I think about your soul and pray for you*». Prof. Valdoni was visibly moved and left the room with tears in his eyes.

31 May. The Pope's secretary, according to an agreement made in his first year of service, is about to fulfil his duty to warn him of the imminence of death. At the Pope's bedside, in a voice broken with emotion, he seeks essential and simple words. He tells him: «*Holy Father, I keep my word... The hour has come: the Lord is calling you!*».

Pope John does not flinch at all and, after a moment's reflection, says: «*It will be good to hear the verdict of the doctors*».

«*This is the sentence, Holy Father: it is the end. The tumor has completed its work*». Pope John promptly replies: «*My suitcase is ready! You have given me the most*



**God also dwells
in pain:
BENEDETTA
BIANCHI PORRO**

From the life of Benedetta, I would like to answer a crucial question, which is: Where does joy dwell? Blaise Pascal, a man of keen intelligence, was born in Clermont-Ferrand (France) in 1623. In his early twenties, he turned away from the faith.

But in November 1654 (at the age of 31!) during a memorable night of prayer that he called a 'night of fire', Pascal felt so strongly the beauty and reasonableness of the Christian faith that he decided to write an "Apology of Christianity": he did not, however, write this work, because he died at only 39 years

of age. Some thoughts remain (Pascal's famous "Thoughts"!) and, in one of them, he observes: *«Man is obviously made to think: his whole dignity lies here and his whole duty consists in thinking as he should. Now, the order of thinking is to begin with one's self, one's author and one's end [= the eternal questions: Who am I? Where do I come from and where am I going?] But, what does the world think about? It never thinks about that, but only about having fun».*

How right Pascal is! How many people live with their souls folded up like a handkerchief: many people only let the smallest part of themselves live (skin, muscles, body...), while they bury life's most precious talents. Again, Pascal writes: *«Man is but a reed, the weakest reed in nature: but it is a thinking reed! All our dignity therefore consists in thinking. Let us therefore study to think well!».*

And what I would like to do with you and therefore invite you to think carefully on a fact that is the sight of everyone.

Here is the fact: on 4 November 1954, a young Swedish writer by the name of Stig Dagerman took his own life at the age of 31, when he was at the peak of his success and, according to the nowadays widely accepted view, should have felt the luckiest man in the world; and after him, a very famous and beautiful actress by the name of Marilyn Monroe, who had reached the peak of her career, poisoned herself to death on 4 August 1962, at the age of just 36. While Mary, the Vergin Mary, just when she was poor and unknown, burst into a song of joy (the *Magnificat!*), which still arouses amazement and admiration today. Mary had a heart overflowing with joy.

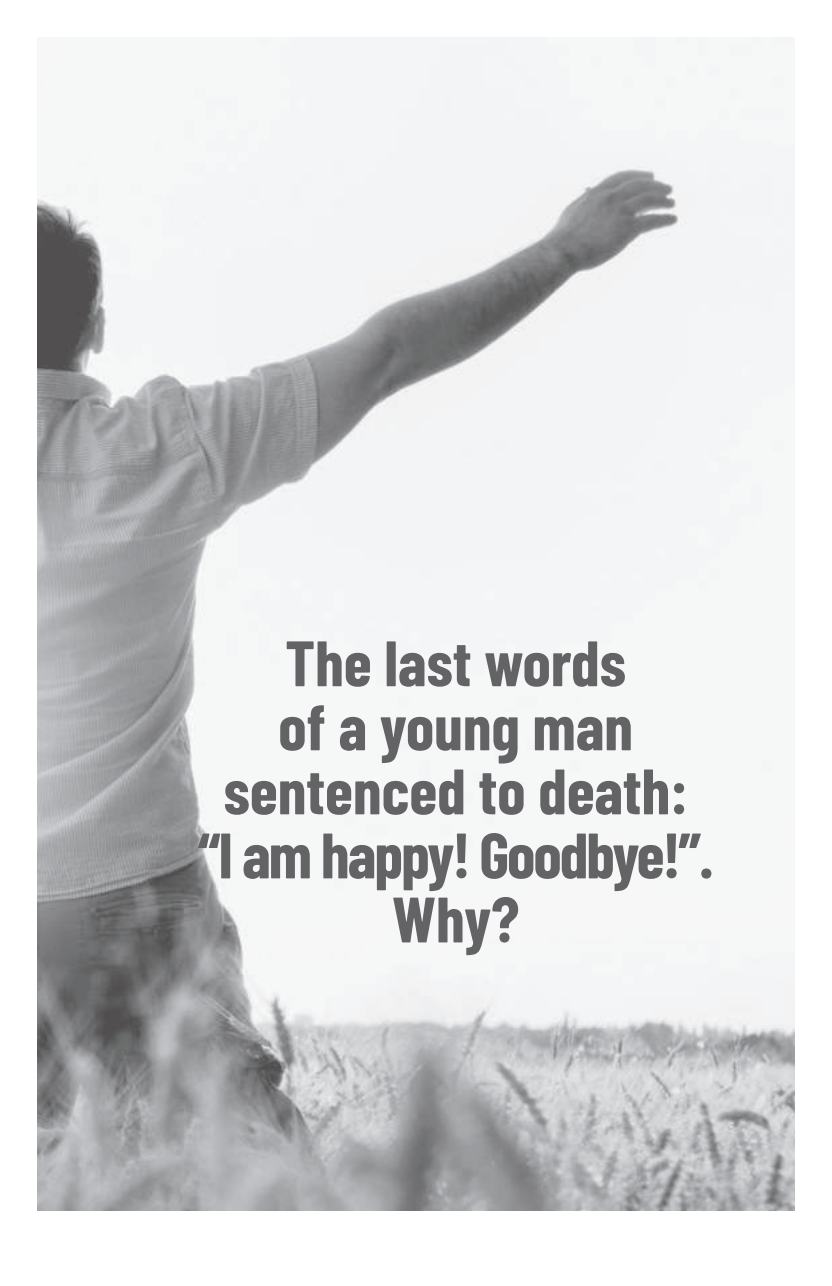
Why did this happen? Therefore, where does joy dwell? And we can make the list as long as we want: the Italian writer Cesare Pavese, just when everyone was praising and admiring him, decided to kill himself on 27 August 1950 at the age of 42. And Edoardo Agnelli, son of the very rich Gianni Agnelli, at the age of 46, committed suicide on

15 November 2000 by throwing himself off a viaduct, while Francis of Assisi, at a time when he was sick (and almost blind!), humiliated and conflicted, composed the wonderful "Canticle of Creatures": the hymn to joy and the beauty of life. His heart was also overflowing with joy.

How is this possible? Where does joy dwell? What is it that makes a person happy? It is a question that arises strongly and inescapably when visiting the life of Benedetta Bianchi Porro. Here, once again, are the facts.

In the summer of 1963, Benedetta lies motionless in her bed in her parents' house in Sirmione on Lake Garda: she is paralyzed, deaf, blind since February, with no sense of smell or odour, able to touch only through her right hand (and that hand remains the only open window for communicating with others).

There were more than enough reasons to fall into depression, but this is not the case. On the contrary! Here is an illuminating episode: the mother, in the



**The last words
of a young man
sentenced to death:
"I am happy! Goodbye!".
Why?**

Roger Schutz, founder of the beautiful Taizé community, one day made this confession: *«Travelling in the poor countries of the Third World, one meets many people who are undernourished in body but beautiful in soul; travelling, on the other hand, in the countries of wealth, one meets people who are beautiful in body but ugly in soul».*

All this is very true! And, in the rich countries, spiritual undernourishment affects young people in particular, who become exhausted and weary of life, and sometimes attack it with unprecedented violence and burn it down with impressive lightness.

Here is the dramatic story of a modern young man who ended up on the guillotine: his name is Jacques Fesch.

Who is Jacques Fesch?

Jacques is a young man who, at the age of 24, commits a terrible crime: and his crime is the dramatic conclusion of a life that is empty and without ideals, but inevitably full of selfishness and whims.

Here is a quick chronicle of the crime. On 24 February 1954, Jacques enters the shop of a moneychanger, Alexander Silberstein, at Rue Vivienne 39 in Paris in the morning and orders a quantity of gold bars. The man trusts him because he knows that the young man has a wealthy father behind him, who can safely pay.

In the afternoon of the same day, Jacques comes back to collect the gold that has only partly arrived, but instead of paying, he takes advantage of a moment of inattention by the money changer and hits him in the head with the butt of a revolver taken from his father's drawer.

Old Silberstein reacts and calls for help with all the voice he has. Then Jacques flees, reaches Rue Saint Marc, arrives at the Boulevard des Italiens, where he sees a block of flats with an open driveway door leading into a courtyard. In the meantime, some people are following him, led by a police officer called to help. Jacques goes up to the fifth floor and waits up there for some calm to return. After a few minutes, having tidied up his clothes, he comes down again, pretending to be amazed and calm, and sets off at a normal pace out of the driveway door. But someone recognizes him and shouts: «*It's him!*». Georges Vergnes orders: «*Hands up!*». Jacques spins on his heels and keeping his hand and revolver in the pocket of his mackintosh, fires a shot. Jacques was tall and the police officer was quite short: the shot reaches him at the heart and he dies immediately.

Jacques escapes again, fires another shot and is finally arrested in the met-

ro station of Richelieu-Drouot: the day of his mad dream ends in the dreary silence of the Paris prison.

Why this absurd crime?

Jacques' parents were of Belgian origin and had moved to France. They were well off and, apparently, nothing seemed to be missing for them to be happy.

The father, Georges, former director of an important credit institution in Brussels, managed a Belgian bank for foreigners in Saint-Germain-en-Laye (near Paris). He was an atheist with an authoritarian temperament: he never bothered about his son except to extinguish all enthusiasm and, above all, faith.

How thought-provoking this is! Certain behaviours of young people have distant roots and, very often, are rooted in the fabric of failed experiences within one's own family. I could give endless examples.

Jacques, born in Saint-Germain on 6 April 1930, was a friendly and overflowing boy with affection especially

towards his mother. For nine years, he received a good education in a religious institute in his town, but at the age of 17, under the influence of his father, he turned away from the faith.

On 5 June 1951 (at the age of twenty-one) he married Pierrette Polack in a civil ceremony and gave birth to a daughter: Veronique.

However, he soon abandoned his wife and daughter (the drama occurred a few months after this abandonment, although he always kept in touch with his wife).

In the meantime, Jacques wanted to set up his own business competing with his father-in-law's: a coal transport company. His mother provides money, but he does not know how to use it. He is discouraged and decides to escape by buying a boat and leaving for Polynesia: he is not used to fighting and therefore runs away from the problem.

But two million two hundred thousand old francs were needed to buy the boat: Jacques asked his father for them, but the father rejects them.

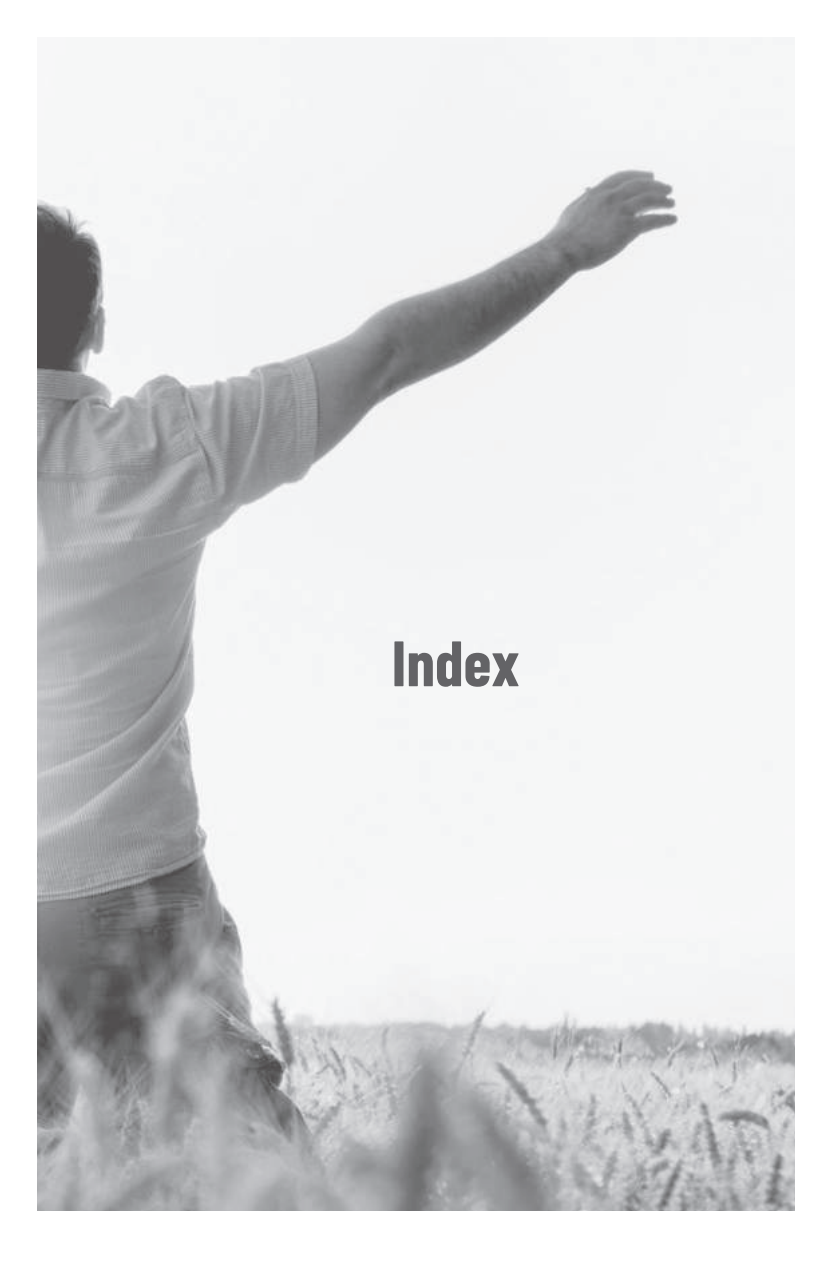
He then decides on a robbery with the outcome we know. This is the scanty outline of the life of a young man who, deprived of all ideals, almost unwittingly arrives at the tragedy of murder.

It is also worth emphasizing the importance of a good approach to the teenage and youth years for the success of one's entire life: today, the way of life in youth very often leads to an adult life without serious commitments and lasting responsibilities. Since the beginning of time, in fact, you reap what you sow!

What happens in prison?

Now we are retracing a path in which God's grace overturns a tragic situation and gives birth to a completely new creature: these are God's great miracles when we let Him work!

Jacques is locked up in the prison of Santé in Paris in an isolation cell. The chaplain approaches him lovingly, but Jacques reacts by saying: «*I do not have faith and I do not need you!*». And accompanies him to the door.

A black and white photograph of a person from the waist up, seen from the side and back. They are wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved polo shirt and dark trousers. Their right arm is extended straight out towards the sky, with the hand open and fingers slightly spread. The background is a bright, overexposed sky. The foreground shows a field of tall, thin plants, possibly wheat or grass, which are slightly out of focus. The overall mood is one of reaching, aspiration, or freedom.

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Memorial of Saint John XXIII

"Jesus, and only Jesus, reveals God to us, opens wide the entrance to his heart and introduces us into the consoling truth: God is Father! God loves you, God loves me, because God can only love: because God is Love".

Quinta card. Cometti

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