

# *Triumph of the Heart*

JESUS IS ALIVE

*Family of Mary*

*2016 (II) / No. 76*

*“Let us ask Mary, the silent witness  
of the death and Resurrection of Jesus,  
to show us the joy of Easter.”*

*Pope Francis*

## *We Cannot Remain Silent*

*The Easter mystery of Jesus’ Passion, Death and Resurrection,  
which we celebrate during every Holy Mass, is the core of our faith.  
In this issue, dear readers, we would like to present a few witnesses  
who experienced in their own lives that:  
Jesus is alive, I encountered him.*

*I*f the moment in which someone finds Christ, his living Lord and Redeemer, is surprising and dramatic, how much more so is it for a Jew, whose people are still waiting after thousands of years for the promised Messiah? Not everybody knows that the former Archbishop of Paris, France, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger (1926-2007) was also once a member of this people, our older brothers in faith.

His parents, who were Polish immigrants, named him Aaron. At the age of ten, the schoolboy found a Bible on their bookshelf and secretly read it. *“I felt like I had discovered something in there that I already knew. ... From then on, the New Testament was deeply impressed in my Jewish conscience.”* Shortly before the Second World War broke out, when the danger for the Jews in Paris became too great, Aaron found sanctuary with a Catholic woman in Orleans. Even though

he was only twelve-year-old, he began, of his own initiative, to ask her and his classmates all about Christianity, even asking the former for a New Testament. He copied the Gospel of Matthew by hand. Looking back, the Cardinal testified, *“Gradually, through the culture and my daily life, the essence of Christianity became more and more familiar to me.”*

On Holy Thursday 1940, a few weeks before Germany invaded France, the fourteen-year-old visited the Holy Cross Cathedral in Orleans and had a life-changing experience. *“I went to the southern transept where a full arrangement of flowers and lights radiated toward me. Touched by this scene, I remained motionless for a few moments. I did not know why I was there or what was going on in me. I did not know the meaning of what I was seeing. I did not know what feast was being celebrated nor*

*what these people were doing in this silence.*

*“I went home to my room and I did not tell anybody about it. The next day, I went back to the cathedral. I wanted to see that place again. The church was empty, empty also in a spiritual sense. And I let this emptiness work in me. I did not know that it was Good Friday; I only thought at that time, ‘I want to be baptized!’ ... Something that I had secretly carried in me for years suddenly took shape. ... All at once, it became clear to me that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, God’s Anointed One.”* Aaron had the honor of being personally instructed in the faith by the Bishop of Orleans. However, the day arrived in which he, the only son, had to tell his parents about his decision to be baptized. *“I did not feel that I was betraying my Jewish roots in any way. Yet it was incomprehensible and unbearable for them, the worst thing that could happen; it was the end of the world from their perspective. I felt very clearly what a terrible suffering I was causing them.”*

His parents tried to convince the fourteen-year-old to deepen his Jewish faith. *“We had a two-hour discussion with a renowned Jewish scholar. I ‘proved’ to him that Jesus is the Messiah. As we were leaving, he said to my parents, ‘You will not be able to change anything; let him go.’”* In a time when many Jews were being baptized just to protect themselves from the Nazis, his parents finally agreed. At his baptism on August 25, 1940, Aaron took the name Jean-Marie, but also kept his Jewish name, Aaron the High Priest, of whom he had always been proud to be a descendant from the priestly class of Levites. In fact, he felt God’s call to the

priesthood already at this time.

After Jean-Marie survived the war and Jewish persecution unscathed, he entered the seminary in 1946, at the age of twenty. Extraordinarily gifted intellectually, he often had to fight with his doubts about the faith. Would he be able to unconditionally accept Christ as his Messiah? His first trip to the Holy Land in the summer of 1951, gave the barely twenty-five year old seminarian the conclusive clarity.

In the dim Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, Jean-Marie entered the little chapel of the Lord’s tomb. *“It was very hot in there. I reached out and touched the marble of the tomb. I felt around it and then lowered my face to the cool stone. In that moment, it passed through me, ‘As truly as this stone lies here, as truly as you touch it and as truly as your hands and face press against it and forces your senses to acknowledge it as real, so truly must you also decide whether or not you want to belong with your whole heart to the Risen Christ—God—the Redeemer, and God’s call to be part of his people for the salvation of the world.’ And in the light that was given to me at that moment, the inner experience, I realized the only important thing is my personal relationship with the one I recognize as God, who created me, called me, redeemed me, loved me. Through this gift, he made me capable of testifying to his grace which touched me.”*

Jean-Marie Lustiger was ordained a priest on Holy Saturday, 1954. As pastor to students and parishioners, then in 1979 as Bishop of Orleans and finally as Archbishop of Paris, he became an unshakable, and for some uncomfortable, witness and fighter for the Catholic faith.

Translated from: Jean-Marie Kardinal Lustiger im Gespräch mit Jean-Louis Missika und Dominique Wolton, Gotteswahl, Sankt Ulrich Verlag, Augsburg

At the funeral on August 10, 2007, Jonas, a great nephew of Jean-Marie Lustiger, brought dirt from Israel at the wish of the deceased and poured it into a clay bowl on top of the casket. Arno Lustiger, the Cardinal’s cousin, prayed in Aramaic the “Kaddish”, a Jewish prayer for the deceased.

*I Was born a Jew. I received my grandfather’s name from my father’s side, Aaron. I became a Christian through faith and baptism, but I remained a Jew, as did the apostles. as holy patrons, I have Aaron the high priest, Saint John the apostle and the grace-filled Virgin Mary. You who pass by, pray for me!*

† AARON JEAN-MARIE LUSTIGER, ARCHBISHOP OF PARIS

# *“Viva Cristo Rey!”*

*“Long Live Christ the King!” In the 1920s, during the bloody persecution of the Church in Mexico, more than 160 priests and 180 Catholic activists testified to their unbreakable, deep love of Jesus with this victory cry. No one and nothing could break their unshakable love of Christ, not even torture. For all of them, like for St. Paul, “Christ is life and death is gain”.*

*The young Jesuit Miguel Pro (1891-1927), who in that perilous time carried the joy of the Resurrection with both humor and mischief to his dejected people, is among the holy Mexican martyrs. Pope John Paul II said of him during the beatification ceremony, “Neither the suffering of a serious illness nor his consuming priestly service ... could extinguish the joy which he radiated and transmitted. It came from his love of Christ.”*

Miguel Pro’s happy childhood was marked by the joyful faith of his wealthy and devout Catholic family. However, nobody suspected that the boy who was always ready to play a prank or make a joke, who cheerfully performed for others his own compositions on the mandolin, would one day become a priest in a religious community. Yet when two of his sisters entered a convent in 1910, the decision to join the Jesuits also matured in nineteen-year-old Miguel’s heart while before the Blessed Sacrament.

In 1914, due to the growing and ever more violent persecution of the Catholic Church through a government of Freemasons, twenty-three-year-old Brother Miguel had to flee his monastery and Mexican homeland, in order to study in exile in the safety of Europe. Fr. Miguel Pro was ordained a priest in Belgium eleven years later. The newly ordained, thirty-five-year-old priest, had a serious stomach disorder, but before he boarded a ship in June 1926, to return to his homeland, he wrote a joy-filled letter to one of the other brothers, *“The Blessed Virgin Mary gave me courage and strength in Lourdes.”* Miguel Pro needed both gifts for the seventeen months of his untir-

ing priestly work, which he anonymously began upon his arrival in Mexico City despite being continuously plagued by hefty stomach and tooth pains. It was at that time that the notorious laws of President Plutarco Elias Calles (1877-1945), a fanatic who hated the Church and surpassed his predecessor in brutality were being enacted. Catholic schools were shut down, religious education was forbidden and religious orders were dissolved. Bishops, priests and religious were no longer allowed to celebrate Holy Mass in public, minister any sort of pastoral work, wear religious clothing or perform any charitable works.

*When millions of Catholics passively resisted, Calles accused the priests of instigating the people. A bloody Christian persecution began. “Please God that I may be one of the first,”* Fr. Pro wrote. He had already been on the black list of the police for a long time. He wrote to his superior, *“They fear for my life! But what is my life? Is it not written that one saves his life by giving it for the others? ... And I sensed a strong power driving me on.”* He felt most powerfully the strengthening closeness of Jesus while celebrating Holy Mass.

The authorities would often spy on and follow him, but whether on a bicycle or under the tarp of a truck, whether on foot with his faithful police dog as a disguise, elegantly dressed in suit or wearing a mechanic’s overalls, he observed with a laugh, *“My appearance is anything but priestly, but it opens many doors for me! Day and night, I always find a way to administer the Sacraments to the underground*

*believers.*” He was prepared to be discovered and arrested at any time. In the Pro Family, his father and siblings with whom he lived, it even became a habit when he left home not to say the customary “see you later”, but to make an act of contrition. Fr. Pro recounted a special meeting shortly before his arrest, “*All the family members said good-bye to one another until we meet again over in the ‘Valley of Jehoshaphat’. Tears ... did not flow—on the contrary! We laughed aloud with our whole heart. Truly, it is not a loss, but a gain for so important a cause to be able to march through the gates of heaven into the eternal fatherland.*”

A failed assassination attempt on General Alvaro Obregon on November 13, 1927, provided the false pretexts to accuse and arrest all three of the Pro brothers—Miguel, Humberto and Roberto—as “conspirators and propagators”.

As they were being arrested, Humberto immediately said to his priest brother, “*I want to make my confession!*”

“*Never!*” screamed a police officer.

“*I will listen to his confession anyways,*” retorted Fr. Pro and gave Humberto absolution. Then he said, “*Children, now you have us. The three of us want to offer our lives for Mexico’s freedom. May God accept our sacrifice.*”

*W*ithout an official interrogation, without due process and without informing the condemned, President Calles set their execution for November 23, 1927. The Pro brothers drew new strength in their anxiety the last night through prayer. In the morning, Miguel turned with composure to his brothers, “*It seems to me that this is the last day. But for us death is gain! Let us go before Our Savior with joy in our eyes!*”

The firing squad was already waiting outside with diplomats, high-ranking officers and the international press, all of whom Calles had invited to this “*victory over religion and clerics*”. Fr. Miguel Pro was led into the “*courtyard of death*”. Asked if he had any final request, he said, “*I would like to pray.*” Kneeling down, Miguel Pro submersed himself in silent prayer for about two minutes, renewing the offering of his life. He had

always been convinced, “*The blood of priests must flow if the fatherland is to be freed.*” Then he calmly kissed his cross, stood up, turned down the blindfold offered to him and said clearly, his arms spread out in the form of a cross, “*May God have mercy on you! God bless you!*” Then a little bit louder, he said, “*Lord, you know that I am innocent. I forgive my enemies with my whole heart!*” With the cry “*Viva Cristo Rey!*”, “*Long live Christ the King*”, the thirty-six-year-old Jesuit collapsed dead under a volley of gunfire. One soldier finished him off with a shot to his temple. Humberto’s execution followed. Only Roberto, the youngest, survived thanks to the intervention of the Argentinian ambassador who arrived just in that moment.

*A* short time later, a loud chant grew outside the police headquarters, “*Lift high the martyrs! Long live Christ the King! Long live the Pope! Long live the Church!*” People streamed past by the thousands to pay their last respects to those who had testified with their blood. As the elderly Mr. Pro prayed at the coffins of his murdered sons, he reverently kissed the forehead of his priest son, dabbed the blood from the wound on his temple and then consoled his crying daughter, “*Be calm, child! There is nothing to cry about here. The two of them were apostles and men without fault. They have now their eternal reward.*” What belief in the Resurrection!

The next day, the same Resurrection joy gripped the whole capital, even the soldiers and police, as the Pro brothers were carried to their grave in a parade of triumph. Under a colorful rain of flowers, the two coffins were escorted by 500 cars along the five miles to the cemetery. The chants did not seem to end: “*Long live Christ the King and the holy witnesses of blood! Long live the Pope! Long live our bishops and priests!*” There had never been anything like it before! At the cemetery, Mr. Pro turned with radiant eyes to the immense crowd, “*Let us praise the Father because he is good!*” he encouraged everybody and bravely started singing “*Holy God we praise Thy Name*”

Translated from: Lothar Groppe SJ,  
P. Michael Pro SJ, FMG e.V., München 1988

# The Cristeros

*Often for us, not being in such a situation,  
it seems unimaginable and yet moving, when we see what great strength  
the Risen Lord gives to his martyrs. "My grace is enough for you!"  
The "Cristeros" in Mexico certainly lived from the strength  
of this grace in the moment of their testimony  
to Christ with their blood.*

In 1926, when faced with the prohibition of any form of religious service, the resistance of Mexican Catholics of all ages and classes grew. While some defended themselves with non-violent action against the anti-clerical government, others, following their conscience, reached for their weapons as an expression of their faithfulness to Christ and his Church. The result was three years of resistance by fifty thousand so-called "Cristeros", who saw it as protecting themselves in this no-way-out situation, to fight in defense and win back their religious freedom. Whether fighting actively or passively, both groups considered it an honor to pay for their steadfast belief in Jesus Christ with their lives, and both groups brought forth saints.

During the Great Jubilee in 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized, along with others, Mateo Correa (1866-1927). He had given Miguel Pro First Holy Communion as a young priest, and he suffered martyrdom in the same year as Fr. Pro. Fr. Correa was captured by soldiers at the beginning of 1927, while he was secretly traveling to administer last rites to a dying member of his parish, Valparaiso. When they tried to take the Sacred Host away from him, he shouted, *"You can kill me, but you will not take the Blessed Sacrament into your hands!"* and quickly consumed the Eucharist.

After a severe beating, they dragged him before Eulogio Ortiz, one of the government's leading generals. He hurled the unfounded accusation of being a member of the Cristeros at the priest. He then ordered him to hear the confessions of a whole row of Cristeros sentenced to death. Fr. Correa had no sooner finished encouraging and

consoling the last candidate sentenced to death and giving him absolution than General Ortiz shouted, *"And now tell us immediately all that they confessed!"* "Never!" responded the priest. *"I'll shoot you on the spot,"* Ortiz threatened. Yet with composure he replied, *"Do it, I won't say a word."* General Ortiz personally shot Fr. Mateo Correa who, like Miguel Pro, died with the Easter salutation on his lips, *"Long live Christ the King"*.

Anacleto González Flores (1888-1927), a thirty-eight-year-old lawyer and family father, also worked tirelessly to defend the faith as a youth leader, catechist and journalist. Through highly motivating speeches he encouraged Catholics to help the Cristeros: *"Our country has become a prison for the Catholic Church. Let us defend our spiritual values because we need them in order to be saved!"* On April 1, 1927, just before Easter, they arrested the resistance leader, who had received Holy Communion every day to be strengthened for the interior and exterior battles for the faith. Anacleto was then tortured because he would not disclose any names nor reveal the Archbishop's hiding place. During one of the interrogations his shoulder blade was shattered by the butt of a rifle. Since he would not break his resolve to stay silent, General Ferreira ordered him to be hung up by his thumbs and to slice open the soles of his feet. His death sentence was clear from the start. In his final agony after being stabbed in the lung with a bayonet and then shot, he said to the General, *"With all my heart, I forgive you. I will soon stand before the divine court, and my judge will one day be yours too. Then you*

*will find in me an intercessor before God.  
You will kill me, but God's cause ... does*

*not die with me. Listen again—I die, but God  
does not die! Viva Cristo Rey!”*

In 1927, two months after Fr. Correa's martyrdom, Fr. Francisco Vera met with the same fate in Jalisco, along with four thousand other Mexican priests. The priests' "crime" was their clandestine celebration of Holy Mass. Their "flocks" were allowed to flee, but they were shot on the spot. This shocking photograph was taken shortly before the execution at the firing squad leader's command. He sent it to President Calles to prove his eagerness to persecute Catholics.

Maria Concepcion, the widow of Bl. Anacleto Gonzalez Flores and a woman of unshakable Faith, said at the coffin of her beloved husband to the elder of her two children, "Behold your father. He defended the Faith to the spilling of his blood. Promise me before his dead body that you will do the same when you are older should God ask it of you."

## Little José

*F*or José Sánchez del Río (1913-1928), Anacleto Flores was a spiritual example at whose grave the thirteen-year-old asked also for courage to remain faithful to Christ, even unto death. His prayers were answered. Both martyrs were beatified in Mexico in 2005.

José, also called Joselito, a good boy with a deep love to Our Lady of Guadalupe, wrested his mother's permission to join the Cristeros when he was only thirteen. "Mama," he said, "*it has never been so easy to earn a place in heaven!*"

In 1927, he became the standard bearer for the Cristeros; his job was to ride with the flag alongside the General. On February 6, 1928, when General Morfin's horse was shot in a battle, Joselito gave him his horse calling out, "*Save yourself! Your life is much more useful than mine!*" The general reluctantly accepted, but in the ensuing battle, the boy was captured by the government troops. They locked up Joselito in his hometown, in St. James' Church where he had been baptized and received First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Now the church had been desecrated and turned into a prison and horse stable. From his cell, Joselito wrote four days before his death, "*Mom, I think I will die soon. Do not grieve over me. Surrender yourself to God's will because I am dying for God. That makes me happy.*"

Since they did not really want to prosecute a child, the soldiers tried to bribe the fourteen-year-

old into denying his faith by offering him freedom, money, a military career or emigration to the USA. Joselito rejected it all and shouted out over and over again, "*Long live Christ the King! Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe!*" Infuriated, the soldiers began shouting wildly and beating him mercilessly. Still, his continued prayer and singing could be heard through the window grates.

On February 10, after Joselito secretly received Holy Communion from his aunt, the soldiers brutally cut open the soles of his feet, made him walk through salt and then forced him barefoot with shoves and curses the long way to the cemetery. They bellowed at the boy groaning in pain, "*Call out, 'Death to Christ the King!' and we will save your life! Say it! Just say, 'Death to Christ the King!'*"

Joselito, however, cried out each time at the top of his lungs, "*Long live Christ the King! Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe!*" Even at the graveyard, in sight of the freshly dug grave, he courageously repeated to the very end his victory cry, so that after shooting him the murderers had to admit, "*The courage of this boy was greater than all of ours' put together.*"

It is quite possible that the seeds planted in the blood of Joselito's martyrdom are sprouting in the martyrs of our day, which also includes many children who just as consciously give their lives for Jesus like the little blessed from Mexico back then.

*P*astor Andrew White, the fifty-year-old Anglican who has led the St. George community in Baghdad since 2005, reported in a television interview about four Christian children from Iraq, all under the age of fifteen. ISIS fighters ordered them, “Say now that you want to follow Mohammed!” “No, we love Jeshua (Jesus in Aramaic)!” they responded. “We have always loved Jeshua, and have always followed him!

*Jeshua is always with us.”* After making this profession of faith, even in the face of death, they continued to refuse to speak the conversion prayer to Islam, and as a result, all four children were beheaded. At this point, it is justifiable to ask us Christians in the West how much longer will we be able to live our Catholic faith in peace? And how much am I willing to sacrifice to profess, “Jesus is alive!”?

## Jesus Became My Friend

*It is high season from May to September in the vacation village “De Angelis” close to the Holy House of Loreto on the Adriatic Coast of Italy.*

*For Franco and Maria, who built this vacation paradise, it is very important to have a program with a variety of relaxing activities for families with teenagers and children. The most important thing to this couple, however, is daily Mass in a beautiful wooden chapel at the center of the grounds, an event which they never miss. That was not always the case though.*

*Signor Franco De Angelis tells us their story:*

*I*n 1971, following my military service, I married Maria Teresa Lupi. We were both twenty one years old and full of optimism and zeal to build our future together. I started my own construction company which became a huge success because the economy was in a strong upswing. With more than a hundred employees, I built eighty apartments in one year.

In 1972, our daughter Manola was born, in 1974, Jerry and in 1982, Chantal. Loaded down with work, I never had any free time. Success motivated me to develop my personal and professional abilities, but as a result, God was pushed further and further down my priority list. Sunday Mass no longer seemed necessary, and there was no time for prayer either. When our thirteen-year-old son Jerry became seriously ill in 1986, I witnessed a miracle. On our way to the hospital,

we passed Loreto. An inexplicable power drew me to stop the car and go into the shrine to pray for his healing. In the Holy House, such a trust was poured into me that I was certain Our Lady would work a miracle. When I walked into Jerry’s hospital room, I saw the doctors turning off the machines and heard one of them comment, “*It’s a miracle, there is no way to explain what happened here!*”

My son’s condition changed dramatically from one moment to the next while I was praying in Loreto, and I was sent home with a healthy child. Not only had Jerry been healed of pneumonia, but of the chronic bronchitis and asthma that had been plaguing him for years. Our family was so grateful and we decided to take our faith more seriously, trying to make room for it in our lives, but we were not very successful.

# Jesus, my Savior and Redeemer

At the beginning of 1987, I suddenly had serious health problems, a fever of nearly 105°F (41°C) that lasted for about a half hour and then disappeared just as mysteriously as it had set in. During this half hour, I had the impression that something was boiling inside me—it was terrifying!

Hospital tests could not determine the cause. At first, the fever attacks took place every four days, but then they became more frequent, happening on a daily basis. I was brought to special clinics, had my blood sent to Switzerland for analysis and my body was examined for ten days for everything known to modern medicine. The results were all the same, “*You are healthy.*”

One doctor advised me to see a certain Professor Rabito, who was an active member of the Charismatic Renewal. It was not easy to receive an appointment with this sought after specialist. Yet, with a little persistence and some luck, I managed. His response seemed very strange to me: “*You are not sick. Somebody has cursed you. You need somebody to pray for you.*” What should prayer have to do with the condition of my health? Yet since I was in such bad shape, I wanted to at least give his suggestion a try.

My wife and I immediately made an appointment with the priest whom Professor Rabito had recommended. Fr. Ferdinando of the Discalced Augustinians kindly received us and explained that he and another person would pray over me. I let them, even though I did not feel anything happening.

When I asked him what I owed him, he responded, “*Are you joking?*” It was new to me that a stranger would do something for free. A few days later, I returned, and they prayed over me again.

Even though the fever did not go away, at least I no longer had the terrible feeling that something was boiling inside me. Meanwhile, I had become physically and psychologically exhausted. My nerves were so frazzled that I could not relax or sleep, and this drained my strength and my abi-

lity to concentrate on running my company. Some days I was afraid I would go insane. It was evident that, with satanic powers, someone was after my life and wanted to ruin my company; there were plenty of people who were jealous of my success.

So Fr. Ferdinando decided to bless our home, room by room. Afterwards, he examined the mattress I had recently purchased. It had been well made. To my surprise, he asked permission to cut it open. As suspected, he found a sealed envelope inside with pictures of our family in which my head had been poked with needles. I could not believe my eyes. He asked me if I had any employees or friends who are Satanists, but I knew no one of the sort. I had not been interested in faith.

The priest explained that somebody with a lot of money had made this satanic curse over me. When we prayed, the evil that had been spoken over me materialized. That is why we found those pictures, which nobody had placed there, in the mattress. Although we bought a new bed, we again found such an envelope in the new mattress. This scene repeated itself five more times until a priest blessed my bed with holy water. It started to burn, as if somebody had doused it in gasoline. We had to do everything we could to keep it from setting the whole house on fire!

In the meantime, we started praying as a family and made friends with the charismatic movement. In May 1987, I was deeply touched by God’s grace during one of the prayer meetings. Some people were praying with me when, very unexpectedly, I felt such a pain in my head that I started to panic and thought it was going to explode. Yet it was just the opposite—I could think clearly once again and was able to recognize beauty in all the different shades of life.

I felt that Jesus had freed me from the spiritual chains that Satan had bound me with because I no longer had been protected through a sacramental life and prayer. I passed into a new freedom, and above all I experienced that Jesus is not only a historical person, but that he is alive!

## *I cannot remain silent about what I experienced*

Only those who have been through something similar can understand how thankful and happy one is to receive the gift of “new life”. I cannot remain silent about it. In my family, at work, with our friends and acquaintances—everywhere—I tell people about Jesus, that he is alive and helping us.

I experienced that evil exists, that it is very strong and can harm us when we do not protect ourselves from it. Yet I also experienced that God is greater and ultimately victorious.

At the office, they thought I was crazy, but I had to share the goodness I had received, even though I did not deserve it. I hired people who were having difficulties in their lives, so that I could help them because I wished that they too would discover Jesus and I might be a brother for them. My heart was burning to evangelize, and that fire has continued to this day.

One evening in 2005, Maria and I were in-

vited to Eucharistic Adoration with a new Church movement. After a period of prayer, the laity were asked to pray for the priests who were present. When I started to pray with the others, it seemed as if I was wrapped in a sheet. I felt very light, and I lost all fear of death. I was free and full of joy.

This strong grace motivated the two of us to learn more about the movement “Gloriosa Trinità” (Glorious Trinity). We did not just come to know them but to love them, and discovered our vocation to become part of this spiritual family founded in 2004 by a Polish priest named Fr. Andrew Swiecinski.

The goal of this movement is to enflame a new faith in Christ on a common path to holiness through a sacramental life, through daily Eucharistic Adoration and the Rosary, through reading the Bible and through concrete works of charity and evangelization. Now I go to Holy Mass every day with my wife, and we pray together.

# Give Me Another Chance

*Torsten Hartung from Germany and his Korean wife Tchang Hi Claudia founded the “Help Maria Association”. They live in the “House of Mercy” in Altenburg, Germany with young convicts who, after they have been released, have the possibility of learning a trade and starting a new life with God. Fifty-three-year-old Torsten tells what motivated him to take on such an adventure.*

Violence was part of everyday life in my home in Schwerin, Germany. A day did not go by in which my three siblings and I did not have to witness at least one violent fight between our parents, and we were often punished for the most trivial things. One day in 1968, when I was seven years old, I came home from school sad because the strap on my lunch bag tore. My mother, who herself had never really been loved, was irate and reacted with such violence that she beat me until I was bleeding from my nose and the corner of my mouth. Even worse than the physical suffering was what she yelled at me: “*We never wanted you,*” and, “*it’s all your fault*”. She nearly went crazy that day. She opened the gas valve and I panicked because I knew how dangerous it was. Despite her slaps I struggled to turn the gas off, and finally she stormed out of the kitchen and up the stairs to the attic screaming that she was going to hang herself and that it would be all my fault. Scared to death I ran after her with a knife so that I could cut the rope and save her. When I arrived, she already had the noose around her neck and started to climb up on a chair. Despaired, I tried to stop her and cut the line. Then I heard her gruff words, “*Stop it! The laundry line belongs to*

*the neighbors*”. It was then that I realized that she was only trying to scare me. That was too much for my childlike soul. When my father came home, she complained so much about my terrible behavior that I was beaten black and blue by my father as well. From that day on, I couldn’t trust anyone anymore. I had lost all sense of justice. Hatred started to take over my heart.

This event had repercussions for the rest of my life. I became the class clown at school so that I could receive attention, since I was not given any love at home. But they complained to my parents about me being a difficult child, and so at home I was beaten all the more.

Consequently, I started to turn into a bully. I suddenly broke out of my role as a victim and became quite conscientiously the culprit. Since I had no self-esteem and my life did not mean anything to me, I could challenge my opponents with nothing to lose, “*If you want to win, you will have to kill me.*” This determination scared people and I was soon known as a brute throughout town.

At the age of eighteen, I was sentenced for the first time to ten months in jail for theft. The second time it was a year and ten months for assault, and the third time for nearly three years.

## A pact with Satan

In 1983, I fell in love with a twenty-two-year-old woman who was very patient and understanding. We moved to Karl Marx Stadt, and I started working as a roofer. It felt good to earn my own money, but what was I to do with it

in a socialist country? We were not even allowed to travel to neighboring Bulgaria for vacation. I had enough of East Germany, and I wanted out.

My plan worked. I faked an escape attempt at the border and, after serving two years in jail as I

had expected, I was deported to West Berlin where the government in Bonn paid for my freedom. After I helped my girlfriend Antje escape to the West, I hoped now for “paradise”. However, I had taken my past with me. On the outside I lived in the desired freedom, but on the inside I was a slave. Due to my deep discontent, we fought a lot, and she finally left me at the end of 1990. Now I was sitting alone in my Berlin apartment at the

age of twenty-nine; I did not see any more sense in my life.

My past was one big disaster. Suddenly Goethes Faust’s pact with Satan came to my mind. Although I believed neither in God nor the Devil back then, I just said out loud,

*“Satan, you can have my soul, I give you my life. In return, however, I want to live like a king in this world for a year and a half.”*

## *I wish for a life of happiness*

I did not have to wait long for a response. A short time later, I was visiting a Russian artist with a friend when I met Igor, also known as the “*Godfather of Riga (Latvia)*”, and his bodyguard, Ivan. We started talking, and they offered to let me go into business with them delivering luxury cars to Russia and the Arab countries. I soon understood that they were not legitimate businessmen but thieves! I teamed up with two friends who had studied electronics to learn how to crack the self-locking mechanisms in Mercedes and BMW. They were specialists, needing only twenty seconds to break into and steal a car. I took care of the logistics, which meant that I arranged counterfeit registration and insurance papers and determined the route and the driver for the delivery of the car. As the mastermind of this organization, I earned almost \$100,000 a week, but I had no idea what to do with all that money.

One thing was clear though, I would not tolerate any competition. When Dieter, my closest assistant, started doing business behind my back and put my position at risk, I simply bumped him off on June 20, 1992 with a shot to the head in a

forest clearing close to Riga. A few weeks later during my vacation in Mallorca, Spain I went into a little church to look at the artwork. There was a bulletin board with prayer intentions which other visitors had written. Although I did not believe in God, I thought, as I was studying the papers, even if it does not help, it will not hurt either. Why not leave a wish there as well? *“I wish for a life of happiness!”*

I wrote on a little piece of paper and pinned it to the board since despite my money and success I was not happy. The following events seemed, at first, to have been exactly the opposite. The next day, I had planned to make a triumphant landing with my paraglider on the beach to bask in the amazement of the tourists, but right at the start I was unlucky with the wind and crashed. I hit the rocks so hard that it actually should have killed me. Surprisingly, however, I stood up with just a couple of bruises and a ruptured blood vessel; I did not break a single bone. Even though my girlfriend whom I had brought with me on vacation did not believe in God, she remarked, *“If you survive that, then God must have a plan with you*

## *He is alive!*

**O**n October 15, 1992, as I was checking out a new transportation route, I was arrested in Stockholm, Sweden by Interpol. Since I was the leader of the largest European auto theft ring, I was immediately placed in solitary confinement, first in Sweden and then in Germany. For a total of

four years, nine months and two days, I saw only one person—the guard who opened the door and brought me food. Since man was created for companionship, it is horrible to be alone, especially when one does not know how to speak to God in prayer. I suffered terribly in that time.

During this period of isolation, I thought about my life and asked myself the question, “*Who am I?*” The answer was always, “*I have never met anybody more evil than myself.*” The memory of my whole life ran through my mind like a movie, and I did not know where to go with all my guilt.

Then Easter 1998 arrived. I had been released from solitary confinement in the meantime, and so I was allowed to watch a Jesus movie with the other inmates. In the evening, I wrote in my diary, “*Jesus, you had your Resurrection. Give me another chance! Grant me a new life too!*”

I had already forgotten those words a few weeks later when, on May 15, I was lying on the bed in my cell and watched as a draft pushed the white sheet which I had drawn over the window to keep out the cold against the cross-shaped bars. The cross reminded me of Jesus, and I called out into the void, “*I don’t know if you exist, God, but if you do, give me a new life! Just look what I’ve done. I’ve placed myself above you by deciding between life and death. I don’t want to live like that any longer.*” I told God everything that I had done; it was actually the first time I had ever prayed. Despite my best efforts, I started to cry; tears of contrition ran down my face. Then I heard a voice, which said to me with such indescribable love and mercy, “*I know!*” At that moment everything that I considered important faded, and I knew, “*This Jesus exists,*

*he’s for real, he lives.*” From now on, there is someone new in my life: HIM. When I met my fellow prisoners the next morning with a smile on my face, they thought I had snapped. For the first time in my life I noticed the beauty of creation: the daisies, the sky, the fresh air. I did not recognize myself anymore. What happened to me? Who was this Jesus? I wanted to learn about him. So I started reading the Bible, and asked for Christian literature. I did not understand anything though. Later, lying on my bed still wondering what had happened to me, I saw the Bible on the shelf and heard the same voice again, “*Take it and open it!*” I followed the command and opened to the passage, “*If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing.*” (1 Jn. 1:9)

Is that possible? Can God forgive all my sins? Mine? I could hardly believe it. Again two months later the same voice encouraged me anew to open the Bible, and this time I read, “*You were dead in your transgressions and sins. All of us once lived ... following the wishes of the flesh and the impulses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ. ... For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast.*” (Eph. 2) Then it’s true, he had given me a second chance.

## *There where I met him*

*I* looked forward to the weekly prayer meeting and catechism. On June 20, 2000, in the Berlin-Tegel Correctional Facility, I was baptized and became a child of God, who knows the most secret desires of my heart, who “knows” everything about me and loves me. I realized only later, that it was exactly the day on which, eight years earlier, I had committed murder.

Now I started to ask God what he wants of me and told him to show me what I should do once I am released. He answered me, “*Go back where I met you, and build a house of mercy.*”

In 2006, I was released early from prison,

after serving fourteen years of my sentence. A Christian woman took me in and recommended that I join a pilgrimage group to Medjugorje. Since I had no money, no work and no home, I accepted the proposition and trusted that God would show me where to go from there. And so it was. A South Korean priest who accompanied the group invited me to Korea to give witness to my life.

There I met and fell in love with the woman who is now my wife. In December 2007, we said yes forever and consecrated our marriage to Our Lady. Since then, I work there where I met God—in prison. Three days a week I go to

the juvenile detention center to help the young people escape from their misery by reflecting on their past and telling them about God. Nobody

is born a criminal; and nobody is condemned to remain a criminal forever. They see it in me—I was one of them.

I consecrated myself to Mary in prison in 2001. I did so very consciously because so much in me had been ruined because my biological mother was unable to love me. So I asked Mary to be my mother, and I can testify that she far surpassed all my expectations.

## No Price is too High for Christ

*Joseph Fadelle went through hell for Christ. Born in a Shiite family in Iraq, he came in contact with the Christian faith through a comrade during his military service. His friend's sincere character and a personal encounter with the Risen Lord pushed him to convert, even when he must be ready to pay for it with his life.*

Joseph Fadelle, formerly Mohammed al-Sayid al-Musawi from Baghdad, is a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed. His name betrays his noble roots, even if he has not been allowed to officially use the title since the Sunni Saddam Hussein came to power in Iraq. His father Fadel-Ali, a Shiite, owned large tracts of land and belonged to the richest aristocrats of the country. He had chosen his son Mohammed as his successor even though he is not the oldest of his ten sons. Mohammed savored his position of honor. When his mandatory military service could no longer be postponed, his father advised him, “*You keep an eye on the area and see whether there is a zone exposed to combat, and then you come back and give me your report so that I can have you exempted.*” So in 1987, the twenty-three-year-old left his family and went to the barracks in Basra in southern Iraq. His roommate was a forty-four-year-old farmer, a Christian. Although Mohammed did not consider himself to be a strict Muslim, he still read the Qur’an faithfully and knew from the earliest days of his childhood that Christians are heretics who adore three gods.

Yet Massoud seemed to be much different than he expected a Christian to be. It was obvious that Allah had led the two of them together so that Mohammed could convert Massoud to

Islam. After a few days, Mohammed discovered a book on his roommate’s shelf entitled, “The Miracles of Jesus”. He had never heard anything about miracles, and even less about this Jesus. His curiosity was roused and so he began to read about the miracle of Cana and was fascinated by this wonder worker. The next morning he asked Massoud, “*Who is this Jesus in your book?*”

“*He is Isa ibn Maryam, Isa, the son of Mary. He was called Jesus for six hundred years and then when Islam arrived he became Isa,*” was the simple answer of the Christian. “*Tell me, do the Christians have a book like the Qur’an?*” Mohammed continued. He was very surprised to hear that they did in fact. He wanted to read it, at least to help Massoud to recognize the indisputable value of Islam. Yet when he asked if Massoud could obtain a Bible for him, Massoud countered with an unexpected question, “*Have you read the Qur’an? Really read it? And understood the meaning of each word, of each verse?*”

The question caught Mohammed off guard; this man had hit a nerve. The Imams had always said that reading the Qur’an from start to finish was what would be rewarded on the Day of Judgment. It was not at all important to understand the text; that was better left to the clerics. “*If you*

want me to bring you the Gospel, that's fine with me, but on one small condition: you will first reread the Qur'an while really trying with your intelligence to decipher the meaning of it; be honest with yourself and do not cheat."

During his first leave of absence at home, Mohammed studied the Qur'an. The results were fatal. He asked himself why Allah came to clarify rules about repudiating a wife and delaying one's prayers, and why the Qur'an emphasized with such insistence the superiority and authority of men over women. Not even his sheik friend Ali Ayatla, an expert on Islam, could give him a convincing answer. He was even more disappointed after studying Mohammed's life. How could the Prophet marry a seven-year-old girl and make his own daughter-in-law his seventh wife? "The

Prophet's behavior and life became a source of embarrassment to me," Mohammed admitted in his autobiography.

"The following weeks left me depressed and increasingly turned in on myself, the more the foundations and the sacred things of Islam, which were my landmarks, collapsed one after the other. ... I doubted that it was the word of Allah. ... On what could I base my life if Islam was no longer its pillar? ... As though by a survival instinct, I clung to the idea that perhaps the Qur'an had been compromised, altered." After three or four months of reflection, Mohammed finally had to bitterly acknowledge that his faith had been thoroughly shaken by this critical examination, and under these circumstances, he did not have the slightest chance of converting Massoud to Islam.

## An irresistible draw

One May morning in 1987, Mohammed awoke a different man. He was full of a profound joy, the consequence of a miraculous dream which he had that night. "I was on the bank of a stream.... On the other bank was a figure about forty years old, rather tall, dressed in a beige one-piece garment in the Middle Eastern style, without a collar. And I felt irresistibly drawn toward that man, impelled by the desire to go over to the other side to meet him.

"Then when I began to leap over the stream, I found myself suspended in the air for several minutes that seemed to me like an eternity. Somewhat alarmed, I even feared that I might never be able to come back down to earth. "As though he had sensed my growing uneasiness, the man on the other side stretched out his hand toward me, so as to help me cross the watercourse and land beside him. ... I was struck by his beauty.

"Looking at me with an infinitely kind expression, the man slowly spoke to me a single enigmatic sentence, in a reassuring and inviting tone of voice: 'To cross the stream, you must eat the bread of life.'"

That morning Massoud returned from leave

and calmly greeted Mohammed with a smile. "Here is the Gospel," he said simply. Finally, after five long months, Mohammed opened the book to the "Gospel of John". He started reading and lost track of time. When he reached the sixth chapter, there was turmoil in his soul. "By what miracle I cannot say, but at that moment I had just read the words 'the bread of life', exactly the same words that I had heard several hours before in my dream.

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger.' Then something extraordinary happened inside of me, like a raging fire that swept away everything in its path, accompanied by a sensation of bliss and warmth—as though all at once a dazzling light illumined my life in an entirely new way and gave it its full meaning. This is how I imagined a lightning strike, and it was even more than that! I had the impression of being inebriated, while an extraordinarily strong feeling arose in my heart, almost a violent, amorous passion for this Jesus Christ about whom the Gospels speak. At the same moment I understood that my dream the night before had been more than a dream." From this moment on, Mohamed had

only one thought, one desire, namely to eat from this “bread of life”, even though he did not really know what it is. With great elation, he related his experiences to Massoud, but his Christian friend turned white, *“In this country you cannot change religion just like that. It is punishable by death! ... Swear to me that you will never speak about all this when you return to your family!”* The last four months in the barracks

were unforgettable because Massoud taught the new convert how to pray and meditate.

Mohammed spent hours in heart-to-heart conversations with Jesus and came to know and love him more. Yet what was he to do when his military service ended? Mohammed wanted to be baptized because that was the only way he could receive the “Bread of Life”, which he now desired more than anything else in the world.

## The return to Baghdad

When Mohammed returned to Baghdad, he sought out the Catholic Church and asked to be baptized. Yet the Christians knew how dangerous it is to help a Muslim to convert. Only after many disappointments did God send him a wise spiritual father, Abouna Gabriel, to whom he could open his heart.

Mohammed’s father picked out a wife for him and soon they were married. Their first son, Azhar, was born. Since Mohammed left on his own to meet with Abouna Gabriel relatively often, his wife became suspicious that he was being unfaithful. So he told her that in his heart he had become Christian and the story of how it happened. At first, she was in shock. Three nights later, however, God gave her a dream in which a beautiful woman offered her an unoccupied place at a set table. Anwar needed six months to distance

herself interiorly from the Qur’an and, therefore, also from her family. She felt a burning in her heart when she listened to her husband, and she told him, *“When I hear you I even wonder whether you might not have actually met him.”* One evening she said in a quiet voice, *“Mohammed, I have decided for Christ.”* From then on, they had a common goal—to be baptized in order to receive Holy Communion. Mohammed hid what he was carrying in his heart from his father and brothers for ten years. Yet one summer evening in 1997, as Mohammed and his wife returned from Abouna Gabriel, there was something in the air. The maid told them that one of Mohammed’s brothers had come by and was playing with two-year-old Azhar. When he asked his nephew where they always go on Sundays, the little boy radiated as he made the sign of the cross, and innocently betrayed the fact that they are Christians.

## The Fatwa

That night in June, it was hard for Mohammed to sleep. Before dawn, he was awoken by pounding on the door. One of his brothers told him his father had important business to discuss, so he quickly went to his father’s house.

He had hardly come through the doorway when he was brutally attacked. His hands were tied behind his back and his feet put in chains. Bewildered, he recognized his brothers, uncles and cousins, one of whom worked for the secret

service. They had pistols and machine guns pointed at him, and suddenly his father entered. Mohammed looked imploringly, *“Father, what is happening to me? Why?”*

*“You are becoming a Christian? You are totally sick! Do you realize the shame that that will bring upon me, your father?”* Even his own mother, who had entered the room in the meantime, spit the words in his face, *“Kill him and throw his body in the Basel canal!”* They

abruptly grabbed Mohammed and forced him into the trunk of a car. *“The only thing that mattered to me now was the prospect of dying without having been baptized.”*

A short time later he was standing before the highest Shiite authority in Iraq, the ayatollah Muhammad al-Sadr. After a long interrogation, the ayatollah pronounced the verdict, *“If it is confirmed that he is a Christian, then he must be killed, and Allah will reward the one who carries out this fatwa.”*

After two hours, Mohammed found himself before the most horrible prison in Baghdad, the one in which Saddam Hussein locked up anyone who dared to oppose him. His cousin from the secret service took him in without saying a word. He received the number 318 and was taken to a little cell in which sixteen other prisoners were already packed together, sitting on the floor. Then the interrogations began with blows and torture.

*“Who is the first Christian who dared to speak to you? That is what we want to know. If you tell us, you will become for us just a simple witness and no longer a criminal. Speak!”*

At that moment, Mohammed remembered Abouna Gabriel’s words, *“In asking for baptism, you are risking your own life, but also the lives of the Christians who will have responded to your request.”* He took a deep breath and replied, *“I don’t know any churches nor any Christians...”* Punches, slaps and kicks rained down on him until he collapsed under the blows. One of the guards seemed inebriated with the cruelty with which he beat his victim. The brutal interrogations continued, in the same way, almost daily for three months. *“As I descended several flights on foot, I begged the Holy Spirit to give me fortitude, knowing full well that I would have to climb those same steps again on all fours,”* Mohammed recounted. *“My only help came from the memory of the lives of the martyrs that I had read after my conversion.”*

Punches, slaps and kicks rained down on him

until he collapsed under the blows. One of the guards seemed inebriated with the cruelty with which he beat his victim. The brutal interrogations continued, in the same way, almost daily for three months. *“As I descended several flights on foot, I begged the Holy Spirit to give me fortitude, knowing full well that I would have to climb those same steps again on all fours,”* Mohammed recounted. *“My only help came from the memory of the lives of the martyrs that I had read after my conversion.”*

*“There is a price to pay, and in my case that price was not cheap. ... In my prayers, certain phrases from the Gospels occurred to me over and over. They were among the few that still managed to catch my exhausted attention: ‘You will be hated by all for my name’s sake’ (Lk 21:17), or else, ‘I have not come to bring peace, but a sword’ (Mt. 10:34). Paradoxically, these terrible statements helped me to hold on; they gave me comfort.”* After the interrogations ceased, a new, especially gruesome torture began: isolation, hunger and filth. *“The only true freedom that I had left was to speak interiorly to Christ. Otherwise, no doubt, I would never have experienced such a heart-to-heart dialogue. ...*

*“I imagined that I was there as a convalescent, to be cured of the sickness of not knowing Christ. In my case that sickness had a very precise name: Islam, which authorized me to kill or to lie for my faith. Thanks to the prison it seemed to me that I was recovering spiritual health: things that I had not valued before—peace, meekness—now became essential virtues for me. At the same time my physical health kept declining as a result of the deplorable hygiene.”*

After sixteen months in prison, Mohammed’s physical strength had been exhausted. One day, he had just finished crying out to Christ for help when a guard called out “Number 318”, gave him back his own clothes and said, *“You are free!”*

## Return to his family

Mohammed could hardly believe that he had been released, and now he had the terrible dilemma whether he should return to his clan, to those who had handed him over, or to disappear somewhere in the underground and try to live as a Christian. What did Christ want? The desire to see his wife and children again won. Yet, would they even recognize him; he who had once weighed over two hundred and fifty pounds and was now only skin and bones? The reaction upon his arrival was indescribable—everybody was elated! Surprisingly, his brothers and father also received him joyfully and celebrated with a party. In other words, they knew that he had been released. Only with time did he understand that they had taken him to prison in the hope that he would betray the name of the Christians helping him. Now that the “prodigal son” was finally home, only one thing was important—to keep his conversion to Christianity a secret. That was the real reason for this big scene! After Mohammed had told his wife everything, she explained to him how, after he was arrested, his family confiscated

their documents and took away all their money. It was a very hard time for the family. Their hearts were burning like never before to be baptized and finally receive Holy Communion. Their meetings with Abouna Gabriel were held in extreme secrecy. They prayed and debated what the future of the family should be.

After long consideration, the wise Abouna pronounced the surprising answer, *“In the name of the Church, for prudence’s sake, I order you to leave Iraq. Anything else would mean death for you and great difficulties for the Christian community.”*

Leave everything? Truly everything? The deep family ties, their wealth, the Muslim culture and lifestyle ... everything? Although the sacrifice seemed almost too great for Mohammed and Anwar, their love for Christ, nevertheless, and their desire to be baptized were greater than any attachment. Their preparations were to be kept completely secret. Abouna Gabriel had done everything within his power for them.

## Departure for Jordan

On April 19, 2000, Mohammed, Anwar and their two children left Baghdad and traveled towards Jordan. Practically by a miracle, they managed to cross the Iraqi border. Abouna Gabriel had given them the address of a convent in Amman, where they were to ask to speak with Sr. Maryam. This extraordinary nun set everything in motion to arrange documents and a place for the refugees to stay. For the first month, everything seemed to be going well when suddenly Sr. Maryam came to Mohammed very pale and unusually nervous, *“You have to leave here right away; they have found you. ... I saw your sister Zahra, and surely she is not alone.”*

Sr. Maryam had recognized her from the refugees’ family pictures. There was no quick solution

though. The only possibility they had was to not leave the house and to trust that nobody would betray them. God then gave the family a great consolation in their painful situation—Bishop Bassam Rabah found a way to finally accept them sacramentally into the Catholic Church. On July 22, 2000, behind closed doors, the whole family was baptized and received the “Bread of Life” for the first time.

A new life began for Mohammed, who from that point on was called Youssef (Joseph), and his wife Anwar, now called Marie: *“My life began for me that day, now that I could finally respond to the call of the man who had summoned me once in a vision that I still remembered clearly thirteen years afterward.”*

*This man whose goodness and radiance had attracted me so much.*” Bishop Rabah found a job for Youssef doing construction work on a church where he was relatively well protected. He very gladly took on the service of sacristan. Among other things, Sr. Maryam was working on obtaining visas for the newly baptized, so that they could leave the country since remaining there for any length of time was too dangerous. However, the applications and negotiations dragged on for months. Christmas was at the door. A good father, Youssef wanted to find a gift for his children, even if it meant leaving the house and going into the city. It was early afternoon. After a successful shopping trip, Youssef was about to return with a taxi when someone called out his name. He innocently approached the car from where the voice came; then his heart nearly stopped. Four of his brothers and his uncle, Karim, were inside. They climbed out of the car, surrounded him and then shoved him into the car saying, *“Come on, we have to talk!”*

Once they were out of the city, they pulled over and climbed out of the car. For three hours they tried to convince him, one after another, that he should return with them and forget about Christianity. When his uncle reached the end of his nerves, he pulled out a pistol and pointed it at his nephew, hoping that this would convince him. His four brothers were standing behind him,

provoking him, *“If you are not willing to come with us, someone will kill you.”* Everyone knew there was a fatwa against him.

One word led to another, and suddenly there was a deafening explosion. *“What followed remains a mystery to me. How did it happen that the first bullet, shot by Karim, did not hit me? What was that interior female voice that told me to run away at top speed? And the other bullets that came afterward, the ones that came very close to grazing me as they whistled past my ears - did they really miss me? Before sinking into unconsciousness, my final thoughts were surprise at the burning sensation of a single bullet, the one that had made me fall into the mud, in that deserted valley. When I came to my senses I was at the entrance to a hospital.”* The wound was deep, and they were talking about amputating his leg. As Youssef was trying to accept this thought, something miraculous happened. Blood was trickling out of his leg, but on the side opposite from where the bullet had entered, and the bullet itself, which had been previously lodged in his calf, was no longer to be found. The x-rays showed that the bullet hit neither a bone nor a muscle, something that was impossible. One of the doctors, who was not a believer, admitted, *“From now on, I could just as well believe in the Resurrection of Christ.”*

## *A new homeland in France*

*F*ollowing this event, they knew they had to leave where they had been staying and disappear. It was obvious that Youssef would not escape his family’s thirst for revenge in Jordan. Again he started the difficult and nerve-racking process of making a visa to leave the country.

On August 15, 2001, the day had finally come when the family, under the protection of Our Lady, started their flight to France. In the early morning, they went to Holy Mass with Bishop Rabah and received his blessing. *“Once again the ‘Bread of Life’ received from the hands of a priest had obtained peace of mind for me,”* Youssef recalled. Again he would have to make a

home for his family, and that in a country whose culture and language were completely foreign to him. They succeeded because Jesus, the Risen One, meant more to them than anything they had in this world.

*“Meanwhile my family is indeed the cause of all my troubles. And that is the hardest thing for me to accept. I fight every day, though, against that bitterness, knowing very well that it is not Christian. Of all the battles I have fought until now, this will certainly be the most difficult. ... This, no doubt, is the most difficult thing that Christ is asking of me today: to love my enemies.”*

# Christians and Islam

*I*n an interview with the French Christian magazine 'L'Homme Nouveau' published on November 20, 2010, Joseph Fadelle spoke about what Islam has to give to the world and what attitude we Christians should have toward Muslims:

*"First of all, it is important to distinguish between Muslims and Islam: Muslims are part of my family, and I love them very deeply. Islam, as a religion or an idea, however, is the worst thing mankind has ever produced. It is the only religion that instructs to kill, and therefore it is a concrete threat to the world. Christians who kill, do not live the words of the Gospel, but Muslims who kill are the ones who truly apply the Qur'an, because the Qur'an and its law call to murder. (The word 'kill' appears one hundred eighty times in the Qur'an, twenty-seven times as a command!) Among the Muslims who do not know*

*the Qur'an, there are very good people. Those who know the Qur'an and live here in France seem to be moderate because, right now, they are a minority and cannot apply the Qur'an. Yet the day they become the majority in parliament, they will opt for the Sharia (the religious law of Islam).*

*"My goal is to destroy Islam by helping the Muslims to learn to understand the Qur'an and not just repeat it from memory. That has to start with prayer, however, because we are only an instrument of the Holy Spirit. I proclaim loud my truth which is Christ. This truth kills nobody; it loves. I do not force it on anybody, but I speak about the love of Christ. This is in no way intolerance, because this love challenges us to love even our enemies. We Christians may not sleep, we have to speak with the Muslims. It is not only about mercy,*

Source: Joseph Fadelle, *The Price to Pay: A Muslim Risks All to Follow Christ*, Ignatius Press, 2012.