

# Volunteering: Love and Freedom

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I would like to begin by telling you a story – a true story. On 8<sup>th</sup> July 1635, an Englishwoman called Mary Ward arrived here in Naples. I say she was an Englishwoman, but Mary Ward was truly a citizen of Europe. During her lifetime, she walked all over Europe, several times crossing the Alps on foot in the dead of winter.<sup>1</sup> In addition to her native English, she spoke Italian, probably some German, and Latin, and communicated- in person and by letter- with some of the most powerful European leaders of the age, including Isabella the Archduchess of Flanders, Elector Maximilian in Bavaria and the Emperor Ferdinand II in Vienna. Together with her companions, Mary Ward founded communities or schools in modern-day Belgium, in Germany, Austria, Italy, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. It was one of these schools that brought her to Naples. Some of her companions had travelled ahead of her and opened a school there, while Mary herself remained in Rome. By the time Mary arrived in Naples, the school was flourishing, educating several girls of local noble families, and the community was beginning to accept novices.

I begin with the story of Mary Ward because I want to draw attention to three things. First of all, she was a woman awake to the needs of her age, and determined to address them. In an era where many people thought it a waste of time, she provided an education for girls, and made sure that they did more than needlework – she wanted them to learn Latin.<sup>2</sup> More than that, in an age where some doubted women’s capacity to experience God, she was determined that these girls should know their faith. In the years of renewal following the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent, the Church would need educated and godly laypeople. Mary Ward was also aware that meeting this need would mean a courageous challenge to the Church’s own structures at the time: she was determined to found a form of apostolic religious life for women, modelled on the Society of Jesus. This initiative brought trouble from secular clergy in England, where some of her community were active in the Catholic underground network, and significant alarm from the Jesuits, few of whom approved of Mary’s aspiration to imitate their way of life. Her attempts to have the order approved, for which she petitioned before cardinals and the Pope himself, met with rejection.

This leads us to the second thing I want to note: Mary Ward’s remarkable ability to cope with adversity. She lived to see her life’s work destroyed: she herself was imprisoned in Munich as a ‘heretic, schismatic and rebel to Holy

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<sup>1</sup> She went on foot from Liège to Rome, onwards to Naples and Perugia, twice back and forth from Rome to Munich, to Vienna and Pressburg (modern day Bratislava), to Paris and finally back to England.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Mary Littlehales IBVM, *Mary Ward: Pilgrim and Mystic* (London: Burns & Oates, 1998), p.158.

Church', her communities suppressed, and many of her schools closed.<sup>3</sup> Returning at last to England with her closest companions, she died in Yorkshire, the county of her birth, while the Civil War raged around them. She was sixty years old. But despite the fact that she died with her greatest hopes unrealised and her work unravelled, she remained steady in her trust of God, filled with joy. Even on her deathbed, she said to her companions, 'What? Still look sad? Come, let us rather sing and praise God joyfully for all his loving-kindness.'<sup>4</sup>

What gave Mary Ward this irrepressible energy, this courage, this depth of trust in the Lord? What enabled her to be so perceptive about the needs of her age, and so courageous in addressing them? What was it that enabled her to give of herself so fully, and not to despair when all her work seemed to be destroyed? As a young woman growing up in England, Mary Ward had been very devout, and attentive to the guidance of the priests and spiritual directors with whom she came in contact. She was given various spiritual manuals by such priests, and at one point found herself undertaking some recommended spiritual practices that did not seem to be helpful. At that young age, she came to a conclusion that shows genuine spiritual maturity: 'I will do these things with love and freedom,' she said, 'or I will leave them alone.'<sup>5</sup> It is these two things that I want us to focus on today, as we think about our central theme of volunteering: freedom and love. As we reflect on freedom and love, we will see how they relate to those qualities of Mary Ward that I think are so important for us today: discerning attentiveness to the needs of our own age, courage in imagining new ways of addressing them, and steadfast trust in God, even in the face of adversity.

## FREEDOM

'I will do these things with love and freedom, or I will leave them alone.' Volunteering is something we do that comes from our freedom, in two senses. First of all, it is something we freely *will* to do – it is not compelled. In many of our European languages, the word 'volunteer' itself suggests this connection to free will: *ein Freiwillige; une volontaire or une b n vole; un volontario, uno volontario*. Second, it is something that we do 'for free', we say in English, without receiving payment. Usually it is something we do in addition to the paid work that we do to earn our living.

Catholic social teaching does not have much to say about volunteering *per se*, but when it speaks about the kinds of work undertaken by Jesuit social centres – care of the poor and disenfranchised, care of migrants and so on – it suggests that these are not things that we are free to do or not, as we choose. Care for the poor, the marginalised and the stranger is a *demand* on us, an

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<sup>3</sup> Littlehales, *Mary Ward* p.214.

<sup>4</sup> Gillian Orchard IBVM (ed.), *Till God Will: Mary Ward Through Her Writings* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), p.119.

<sup>5</sup> Orchard, *Till God Will* p.10.

obligation. Indeed, it is among the commandments: 'If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren...you shall not harden your heart or shut your door against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need.' (Deut 15:7-8) 'The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.' (Lev 19:34) So although these are activities we undertake freely, by choice, in a certain sense they are not optional: we are not free, either as human beings or as followers of Jesus Christ, to ignore the humanity of our fellow human beings, which is to say it is not a matter about which God is indifferent! And yet, at the same time, we *are* placed before God with freedom, with the ability to respond or not respond to God himself, and to the needs of others.

So let's reflect a bit further on the nature of our freedom before God. What does our freedom mean? First of all, it is not a Promethean freedom, an absolute ability to make of ourselves what we will. I think this is a popular western notion of freedom, however - an absolute freedom from natural, cultural, social and economic constraints. What begins in the modern period as a desire to be free of oppression, free of the rigid and immutable stratification of society, free of overbearing ecclesiastical control, has become in our own period a desire to be free of our genes, free of the natural process of ageing, free even in relation to our gender. Those things that generations in the centuries before us regarded as more-or-less fixed -social status, prospects, appearance- are things we expect to be able to change, or aspire to be able to change if we cannot already do so. I say this by way of description rather than condemnation: there are positive features to this new sense of freedom from constraints, as well as more troubling aspects.<sup>6</sup> But although there are elements of this postmodern sense of freedom with which Christians can agree -yes to freedom from oppression, yes to freedom from poverty- the fundamental idea of freedom as a total lack of constraints of any kind is, at bottom, not a Christian one, because it springs from the idea of a universe without a God.

Jean Paul Sartre, making the case for an atheist existentialist humanism, articulates this very clearly. If we think of human beings as created by God, then we must think of them as having a certain purpose, as corresponding to a certain divine idea - just as when we look at paper-knives, we know they have been designed and made with a particular task in mind.<sup>7</sup> Even in the modern period this idea that 'essence precedes existence' persists: we are all examples of one stable 'human nature', which is always and everywhere the

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<sup>6</sup> Catholic social teaching itself reflects this movement towards a new sense of freedom: compare Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* §17 with John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* §43, for example.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 2007), pp.27-9.

same.<sup>8</sup> But atheistic existentialism eschews even this possibility: 'there is no human nature,' Sartre says, 'because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is...Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.'<sup>9</sup> There is no divine intention behind human existence, no creative intelligence, and thus no purpose, no particular task in mind that shapes our being: our freedom consists in a complete freedom from constraints of this kind. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.

The idea of complete freedom from constraints may be appealing, but it is not very realistic, and *a fortiori* so for those who lack wealth and power. All of us know that our freedom to make of ourselves what we will is constrained by the fact that we are born into particular ages, particular places, particular families and bodies. Even if we wanted to escape all of these things, it would not be possible! Importantly, we also know that we are born into situations that shape and sometimes constrain our *moral* freedom. Social pressures can shrink our moral horizons, and reduce the options for action that present themselves to us, so that we come to regard those 'structures of sin' that surround us as simply part of our natural environment, or if we do recognise them for what they are, we lack the imagination or the courage to tackle them.<sup>10</sup> It takes people of extraordinary vision and courage to discern and disrupt these structures of sin in which we are enmeshed. We will return to this later on.

So the idea of freedom as an absolute freedom from constraints, a freedom to make of ourselves what we will, does not reflect our experience that our persons and the world around us are not a blank canvas. But more importantly, Christians want to say that our freedom is not a total freedom from constraints because human freedom has a particular shape to it. Where Sartre says, 'There is no such thing as human nature because there is no God to conceive of it' Christians say, 'There *is* such a thing as human nature because God has made it.' We are created by God and we are created for God, and so our freedom has a *shape* to it. Our freedom consists in going out, as Karl Rahner puts it

to encounter that image of ourselves which God has made for himself, the picture of which he holds before us, and by which we, imperfect as we are, are always simultaneously cast down and delighted, because we recognise in it both ourselves and our God.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* p.29 On the 'consensus gentium' in the Enlightenment period and related discussions in twentieth century cultural anthropology, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) pp.38-9.

<sup>9</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* p.30.

<sup>10</sup> See *Gaudium et Spes* §25, *Reconciliation and Penance* §§16-17, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* §§36-7.

<sup>11</sup> 'We can do no more than move towards it, it is only slowly revealed, and never wholly in this life. While we are still pilgrims, it is not only God but ourselves that we shall know only in reflections and likenesses; it is only *then* that we shall know ourselves, too, even as we are known.' Karl Rahner, 'Ignatian Spirituality and Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus' in *Mission and Grace: Essays in Pastoral Theology Vol.3* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1966) pp.176-210 (pp.205-6).

Our freedom consists in walking towards God's desire for us. Perhaps we can make a helpful distinction here between a *freedom of acting* and a *freedom of being*. Our freedom of acting is such that we are free to do or not to do things, to respond or not respond to God, to the truth of our own humanity, and to the truth of others' humanity and the demands that this places upon us. In so doing, we are responding or not responding to a deeper *freedom of being*. Genuine human freedom and integrity consists in growing closer to the truth of our nature, which is created for and called towards participation in the life of God; drifting away from this into a sort of promethean or Sartre-esque 'absolute' freedom is really a kind of un-freedom, and a breaking-up of our self.

It is this truth of the freedom of the human person that produces one of the curious features of Catholic tradition, in which the people who seem most 'fixed' are most free. Mary is conceived free from sin, destined from her beginning for her role as mother of the Lord. Is this predestination a kind of infringement of her human freedom, so that her 'fiat' is inevitable, and she is not truly free at all? Is Mary, from the first moment of her existence, fixed like a tram on a track from which she cannot deviate? No: her 'yes' is the 'yes' of one who is one completely free, whose beginning is at no distance from her end.<sup>12</sup> There is no gap between who she concretely is, and that image of her which God has made for himself.<sup>13</sup> And Christ, who ends his life literally fixed to a cross, trapped between the hatred of those he came to save, and the Father's silence in Gethsemane – is he truly free, or does this scenario have a horrible inevitability to it? Yes, he is free, because human freedom consists precisely in limitless and loving obedience to the Father. True human freedom is not suspended, weightless, a sort of defying the gravity of our bodies and history: true human freedom is being held very close by the Father: 'Let it be with me according to your will,' (Lk 1:38) 'Into your hands I commit my spirit.' (Lk 23:46)

So what does all this have to do with volunteering? Ideally, in our volunteering, our freedom of acting and our freedom of being will coincide. In one sense, in choosing to stand in solidarity with the disenfranchised and the poor, we are freely choosing to recognise the humanity of others and the demands it makes upon us. This is our freedom of acting: we are free to do this or not, and we choose to do so. In doing this, we are growing into that freedom of being that is the most profound freedom of our own nature. In this sense, we are engaged in a kind of obedience, answering the objective demand of our own nature, and that of others. Volunteering is not just something we do *because* we are free: it is also something we do in order to *grow* into that deeper freedom to which we are called, the 'freedom of the

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<sup>12</sup> 'Our beginning is hidden in God. It is decided. Only when we have arrived will we fully know what our origin is. For God is mystery as such, and what he posited when he established us in our beginning is still the mystery of his free will 'hidden in his revealed word'.' Karl Rahner, *The Heart of Karl Rahner* (London: Burns & Oates, 1950) p.55.

<sup>13</sup> See Karl Rahner, 'The Immaculate Conception' in *Mary Mother of the Lord* trans. W. J. O'Hara (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke: 1963) pp.42-52.

glory of the children of God' (Rom 8:21), which creation is longing to be revealed.

So volunteering is a way of *acting* in freedom and *growing* in freedom. I want to suggest, too, that it is a way of *revealing* freedom – in the sense that our choice to recognise the humanity of others can reveal or disclose freedom that has become somehow obscured or lost to view. So far, I have suggested that there are two ways in which we are not free, in that postmodern sense of being without constraints: first, we are not free in that we are called to be faithful to our created human nature and calling and, second, we are not free in that we are embedded in social situations that shape and sometimes constrain our freedom. What does it mean to say that my freedom can be constrained? It means that my freedom can become damaged not just by my own personal sin, but also by 'structural sin', embedded in the societal structures and attitudes that surround me and shape me as a moral agent. Like a tree in a prevailing wind grows up bent in the same direction as the wind, growing up in a society with a prevailing way of thinking about and treating migrants or elderly people can bend my freedom out of shape, so that I find it very difficult to act against that prevailing social climate, or difficult to imagine how I could act to change it. Even Church teaching, which so strongly defends human freedom, recognises that powerful social factors can attenuate it, and bend it out of shape.<sup>14</sup>

In many of the gospel healing stories, we see Christ healing those who are suffering not only from disease, but also from exclusion based on prevailing social and religious understandings of purity and sin. 'You were born entirely in sins,' the Pharisees say to the man born blind, and they drove him out (Jn 9:34). We see Jesus healing a man with a withered arm on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees complaining (Mk 3:1-6). In these encounters Jesus is not just healing individuals of their sickness: he is healing a social and religious context that has itself become blinded, bent out of shape.<sup>15</sup> He is revealing the Kingdom. And in the same way, I want to suggest that when we choose to recognise as sons and daughters of God those whom society has discounted or discarded, our action can have the effect of revealing to others around us *their* freedom to act against the prevailing social climate. Where the freedom

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<sup>14</sup> See *Reconciliation and Penance* §16: 'Sin, in the proper sense, is always a personal act, since it is an act of freedom on the part of an individual and not properly of a group or community. This individual may be conditioned, incited and influenced by numerous powerful external factors. He may also be subjected to tendencies, defects and habits linked with his personal condition. In not a few cases such external and internal factors may attenuate, to a greater or lesser degree, the person's freedom and therefore his responsibility and guilt. But it is a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free.'

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Himes suggests that '[t]he truly insidious aspect of social sin is the blindness it causes, what Daniel Maguire calls the "tissue of lies" placed before our eyes so that we fail to see reality. Social sin is an aspect of our fated condition and we are ushered into the enveloping darkness of false consciousness from the outset of our lives. Only with the removal of the ignorance which accompanies the blindness of social sin do we enter into the world of moral responsibility.' See Kenneth R. Himes OFM, 'Social Sin and the Role of the Individual' *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1986), pp.183-218 (pp.213-14).

of others has been cramped by societal apathy, prejudice or ignorance, our choice to act against the pressure of social convention can help to reveal it again. The more we grow into that deeper freedom about which we spoke earlier, the more we are able to keep before our sight that 'image of ourselves which God has made for himself', the more free we will be in relation to those forces that constrain our freedom, to those attitudes and prejudices that blinker us to our own dignity and that of others.

May I make one last comment about freedom? One of the things that strikes me as I read the gospels is how utterly *free* Jesus is: free to eat with sinners and tax collectors and with Pharisees, free to let a disreputable woman anoint and embrace him, free to heal on the Sabbath, free as a child to wander back through the crowds to Jerusalem and his Father's house. And he is constantly engaged in energetically drawing others into that freedom: freeing people from their demons, Zaccheus from his guilt and inadequacy, his friend Lazarus from the tomb. Jesus, God in our flesh, is the freedom of God in the world: healing, straightening, calming, awakening, restoring, turning over the tables. In our volunteering we are not just growing into our *personal* freedom, that deep freedom that comes from walking towards God's desire for us as individuals. When we manage to do this, our freedom becomes the freedom of God in the world all over again.<sup>16</sup> Our deepest freedom is a participation in the freedom of God in the world.

## LOVE

So far, we have reflected on volunteering as a way of acting in freedom, as a way of growing in freedom, as a way of revealing freedom, and as a way of participating in God's freedom in the world. Now what does all this have to do with love? 'I will do these things with love and freedom,' said Mary Ward, 'or I will leave them alone.' Now, if we take this out of context, it sounds like a very convenient get-out clause! It seems to be saying that, once I feel that something is impinging on my freedom and assuming the character of a burdensome duty, or once I lose interest in an activity and I am just turning up and going through the motions, then I am justified in giving up. More than that, in fact – if I am not doing something with love and freedom, it is my solemn spiritual duty to give it up! I used to work with a wonderful sister in a university chaplaincy, who would often describe things as being either 'lifegiving' or 'not lifegiving'. If it was 'not lifegiving', you could be pretty sure she wouldn't do it! Now, she used the term as a way of making a judgement about what kinds of initiatives were genuinely worthwhile, but we can use the same distinction in a more shallow way: if we are not enjoying something, we should abandon it. We can misuse the language of consolation

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<sup>16</sup> See Karl Rahner SJ, 'Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit' in Karl Rahner and Paul Imhof, *Ignatius of Loyola* trans. Rosaleen Ockenden (London: Collins, 1978) p.11.

and desolation in this way, too, if we understand ‘consolation’ just as ‘what makes us feel good’, as opposed to what brings us close to the Lord.<sup>17</sup>

Even with the best will in the world, volunteering can become a burden at times, especially when it seems that nothing you are doing is making a difference: when you cannot keep the people in your care away from drugs, or crime, or danger, or when those you help try to exploit you, when people do not want to be helped in the way that we want to help them, or when we are simply worn out by our efforts to meet a need that never stops growing. In these contexts, it can become tempting to withdraw from the work with a flurry of justifications for why we as individuals cannot continue, or for why, as a group, we no longer think the work is a good use of our time and resources. Alternatively, if we continue with the work, we can end up withdrawing on an interior level: we no longer give ourselves to the work, we no longer risk caring too much, we no longer risk disappointment. We can end up, as individuals or as groups, hiding behind a mask of being ‘professional’, or providing a service, but behind the same face that smiles, the same hands that give, the heart has long since stopped beating.<sup>18</sup> And so we get stuck in a kind of stoic heroism: it doesn’t matter how we feel about the work, the work is important and needs doing. So we keep going, with this disconnect between our hearts and our heads. Now, sometimes this is not a major problem, it is simply a passing phase of difficulty or weariness that we work and pray through. Sometimes, though, that disconnect between our heart and our hands is more long lasting and more serious, and in this case I think it is eventually damaging, either to the work itself or to us.

How can we avoid this kind of long-term disconnect between our heart and our hands, between our love and our freedom of acting? Let’s return again to that line of Mary Ward’s: ‘I will do these things with love and freedom or I will leave them alone.’ What she is talking about here is *prayer*. Given a manual of spiritual exercises that recommended ‘such a multitude of manners and ways of producing various acts of virtue’, she found ‘that what at first was easy and pleasing became difficult and wearisome.’<sup>19</sup> So when she decided that she was going to do these exercises ‘with love and freedom, or leave them alone’, she was not just giving up on something that did not feel good, or that did not work for her. She was making a decision to actively *preserve* something: the simplicity, the honesty of her relationship with God in

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<sup>17</sup> See Franz Meures SJ, ‘The Affective Dimension of Discerning and Deciding’, *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 34 (2008), pp.60-77 (p.71): ‘Sometimes, people think consolation means having good feelings. That is not true, according to the definition of St. Ignatius, because, for instance, in the 1st Week we ask for remorse, pain for our sins, weeping about our sins: that is called consolation. If, in the 1st Week, in front of Christ crucified, we feel real repentance and remorse about how we are living, around us, even though it is sometimes very depressing and humiliating to see all our mistakes and sins and so on, Ignatius says that if we do that honestly in front of the Lord, and all those sorts of bad emotions come out and we can weep, that is consolation, because consolation is what brings us in touch with the Lord.’

<sup>18</sup> See Pope Francis’ comments on dangers facing pastoral workers in *Evangelii Gaudium* §80

<sup>19</sup> Orchard (ed.), *Till God Will* p.10.



the encounter of prayer. This, I think, is important, because it is about *preserving the authenticity of an encounter of love.*

What does this mean for our volunteering? To say that an encounter of love is authentic is not to say that it is necessarily wonderful, satisfying or successful. Authentic encounters of love can be awkward, they can misfire, they can be embarrassing, and they often require considerable working-out.<sup>20</sup> What authentic encounters of love have in common is the willingness of those involved to be genuinely *present* to one another, which means a willingness to be vulnerable and to be honest. For me to engage in an authentic encounter of love, I have to be honest about my desire, and that means relinquishing control over whether and how that desire is answered. It is an inauthentic encounter of love if I conceal my desire at the same time as seeking satisfaction from another person, if I try to command the response I want from another person, or if I fail to be present to their desires.

This need for authenticity –for presence and honesty- applies equally to our relationship with God and to our relationship with others. In both cases, presence means more than just physically showing up: this is important, but it is just a starting point! It means a commitment to bringing our whole self to our prayer and to our work, even when this is difficult or disheartening. Like volunteering, prayer itself can be hard or unrewarding, as well as something that can bring us great joy and a profound sense of God’s nearness. But there is no substitute for this willingness to bring ourselves into the presence of God: not a technique, not an idea of God that we like to look at or that we find inspiring, not looking over God’s shoulder to the task that we have to do next. We must doggedly preserve the authenticity, the honesty, of this encounter with God, remaining always determined to return with humility to this source and begin again. In the same way, we must strive to preserve that commitment to being present in our encounters with others. We need to be present to those we try to serve, not to generalisations or stereotypes about them, and not present to them in a merely transactional way as ‘us the solution’ to ‘them the problem’. We must allow these relationships of service to be continually broken open and reshaped by the presence, the needs and the gift of the other.

We need honesty, too, about our desires, and that means *hope*. We must cultivate in ourselves a longing for the Kingdom, and keep alive a radical hope for the transformation of ourselves, others, the world and all its relationships and institutions, the whole of creation. We must pray for it, we must look for it; we must not allow that desire to fade, and we must not cut it down to the size of what we believe to be possible by our own efforts. This hope, which is a real gift of the Spirit and not merely human optimism and inventiveness, is what will give us the ability to address with imagination and

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<sup>20</sup> Rowan Williams offers some profound reflections on love and vulnerability in the context of sexual encounters in his essay ‘The Body’s Grace’ in Eugene F. Rogers Jr (ed.), *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp.309–321.

courage the challenges with which we are faced. It frees us to work singleheartedly for the Kingdom, and at the same times frees us from imagining that it is a human project, and therefore becoming despondent when our efforts seem to meet with failure. 'Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!'<sup>21</sup>

Finally: love, understood as a commitment to presence and to honesty keeps relationships open as places of genuine encounter. Do you remember Pope Francis' comments about atheists last year? They caused quite a lot of discussion in the press in Britain:

"The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ, all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! 'Father, the atheists?' Even the atheists. Everyone!" We must meet one another doing good. 'But I don't believe, Father, I am an atheist!' But do good: we will meet one another there."

'But do good,' he says, 'we will meet one another there.' In volunteering work, we often quite literally meet people doing good: people of quite different beliefs and motivations come together in the same physical space to do good. But Pope Francis is not talking about a literal meeting, but a deeper meeting, an encounter that has the power to surprise Christians and atheists alike. Love –that willingness to be present, to be honest, to be vulnerable, to be *surprised*– preserves the space in which that kind of meeting can take place.

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<sup>21</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* §86