"Press On To Make Him My Own"

Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation

Rimini 2014

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English translation by Sheila Beatty

On the cover: Eugène Burnand, *The Disciples Peter and John Running to the Sepulchre on Easter Morning*, 1898. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

"The Pope has charged me to bring you his greeting, his affectionate greeting, his encouragement and to tell you that truly he knows he can count on you for that pastoral conversion in the missionary sense, to which he has called the whole Church in Evangelii Gaudium, *the document that has been defined 'programmatic' for this pontificate. A missionary nature that goes in the sense of attraction."*

***Cardinal Pietro Parolin**, Secretary of State for His Holiness*
From the greeting before the final blessing, Saturday, April 5, 2014

Friday, April 4, evening

During entrance and exit:
Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony n. 7
Herbert von Karajan–Berliner Philharmoniker
"Spirto Gentil" n. 3, Deutsche Grammophon

■ INTRODUCTION
Julián Carrón

"Press on to make Him my own."[1] Who of us would not want to be here this evening with the same face, wholly open, striving, desiring, full of wonder, as that of Peter and John running toward the sepulchre on Easter morning?[2] Who of us would not desire to be here with that striving to seek Christ, that we see in their faces, with a heart full of expectancy to find Him again, to see Him again, to be attracted, fascinated like the first day? But who among us truly expects that something like this can happen?

Like them, we too struggle to believe the announcement of the women, that is, to acknowledge the most overwhelming fact of history, to give it space within us, to welcome it in our hearts so it may transform us. We too, like them, feel the need to be seized anew, that all our longing for Christ be reawakened.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit together to reawaken in each of us the expectant waiting, the desire for Him.

Come Holy Spirit

Welcome!

I greet each of you present here, all our friends joining us in different countries by satellite link-up, and all those who will do these Spiritual Exercises in the coming weeks.

Two facts marked our journey in recent months: Beginning Day and my audience with Pope Francis.

During Beginning Day we focused on two questions: "How can one live?" and "What are we doing here in the world?". Asking ourselves those

[1] *Phil.* 3,12.
[2] See the painting by Eugène Burnand (1850–1921): *The Disciples Peter and John Running to the Sepulchre on Easter Morning,* oil on canvas, 1898, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

questions on that occasion, we saw that what we need most is to become more and more an original presence, not a reactive one. Fr. Giussani reminded us, "A presence is original when it springs forth from the consciousness of one's own identity and one's affection for it, and finds its consistence in this."[3]

Since then, many months have passed and we have been challenged by many events. What has happened in the face of the provocations that reality has not spared us? These days are a precious opportunity to see what verification we have done on the proposal we set out for ourselves on Beginning Day. Has the impact with these challenges caused our originality to emerge? Have we verified our consistence, or have we let ourselves be dragged along by the common mentality, failing to go beyond a reactive position?

The audience with Pope Francis, the content of which was taken up in my subsequent letter to the Fraternity, highlighted from the first moment what the Holy Father has at heart as pastor of the whole Church. It does not seem superfluous to return to it at the beginning of our Spiritual Exercises.

What does the Pope have at heart? He told us in his succinct style: the new evangelization, the urgent need to reawaken "the life of faith in the minds and hearts of our contemporaries. Faith is a gift of God; however, it is important that we Christians demonstrate that we live faith in a concrete way, through love, harmony, joy, suffering, because this gives rise to questions, as those that were raised at the beginning of the Church's journey: Why do they live that way? What urges them on? […] [The] heart of evangelization […] [is] the *witness* of faith and charity. What we especially need in these times are credible witnesses who make the Gospel visible by their lives as well as by their words, and who reawaken the attraction for Jesus Christ, for the beauty of God. […] We need Christians who make God's mercy and tenderness for every creature visible to the men of our day."[4]

What the Pope has at heart, therefore, is mission. "The New Evangelization is a renewed movement toward those who have lost the faith and a sense of the deep meaning of life. This dynamism is part of Christ's great mission to bring life to the world, to bring the Father's love to mankind. The Son of God 'went forth' from His divine condition and came to meet us. The Church abides within this movement; every Christian

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[3] L. Giussani, "From Utopia to Presence," *Traces*, Vol. 4, No. 11 [December] 2002, Word Among Us, p. II.

[4] Francis, *Address to Participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization,* October 14, 2013, 1.

is called to go out to meet others, to dialogue with those who do not think as we do, with those who have another faith or who have no faith. To encounter all, because what we all share in common is that we were created in the image and likeness of God. We can go out to everyone without fear and without renouncing our membership in the Church."[5]

The Pope also clearly identified the method: going back to the essential. Going "towards the outskirts of existence," he writes, "requires a shared commitment […] which brings us back to the essential and which is *solidly focused on the essential; that is, on Jesus Christ*. To get diverted by many secondary or superfluous things does not help; what helps is to focus on the fundamental reality, which is the encounter with Christ, with His mercy and with His love, and to love our brothers and sisters as He has loved us." This "urges us to take new paths with courage without becoming fossils! We might ask ourselves: what is the pastoral plan of our dioceses or parishes like? Does it make the essential visible, namely Jesus Christ?"[6]

In the letter after the audience, I wrote: "I ask you to embrace Pope Francis' question as directed at us–particularly at us, who were born only for this, as all of Fr. Giussani's life witnesses. Does each of us, each community of our Movement, 'make visible the essential, that is, Jesus Christ'?"[7] In the face of the historical circumstances through which the Mystery has challenged each of us, have we made visible the essential, or have we been diverted by many secondary and superfluous things?

Calling us back to the essential, the Holy Father shows us where he looks to respond to the challenge of living the faith today in our world. The call back to the essential is a crucial indication of method.

Thus the fundamental question is this: what is the essential for us? The essential is that which answers the question about how one can live. What is the essential for each one of us? No question is more pertinent as we begin our Spiritual Exercises, precisely because it is so radical. "No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other."[8] These words of Jesus tell us that each of us can affirm only one thing as ultimate, so unavoidable is the unity of the human "I". For this reason, in the face of the provocations of life, each of us is forced to decide what ultimate thing she or he prizes more than any other. The impact of circumstances leaves us no way out; it forces us to reveal what we hold dearest.

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[5] *Ibid.*, 2.
[6] *Ibid.*, 3.
[7] J. Carrón, *Letter to the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, October 16, 2013.
[8] *Mt.* 6:24.

How can we discover what the essential is for us, without self-deception? Once again, Fr. Giussani taught us the method: observing ourselves in action, in experience, because "the factors that constitute humanity are perceived [and we become conscious of them] when they are engaged in action - otherwise they are not noticeable. […] The more one is involved with life, the more one also, even within a single experience, comes to know the very factors of life itself. Life is a web of events and encounters which provoke the conscience, producing all different kinds of problems. But a problem is nothing other than the dynamic expression of a reaction in the face of these encounters. Life, then, is a series of problems, its fabric made up of reactions to encounters that are provocative to a greater or lesser extent. Discovering the meaning of life–or the most pertinent and important things in life–is a goal which is possible only for the individual who is involved with life seriously, its events, encounters, and problems. Being involved with life does not mean an exasperated entanglement with one or another of life's aspects; it is never partial. Rather, one must live one's engagement with life's various facets as a consequence of a global involvement with life itself. Otherwise, one's engagement risks being partial, without equilibrium, existence possibly becoming a fixation or an hysteria. To paraphrase a saying of Chesterton, 'Error is a truth gone mad.'" For this reason, "in order for us to be able to discover within ourselves the existence and nature of such a crucial and decisive a factor as the religious sense, we must commit ourselves to our whole life. This includes everything –love, [work], study, politics, money, even food and rest, excluding nothing, neither friendship, nor hope, nor pardon, nor anger, nor patience. Within every single gesture lies a step towards our own destiny."[9]

So then, what happens when you engage with all the factors of life, with all of life? The more you live, the more the nature of your needs appears before your eyes. The more we discover our needs, the more we realize that we cannot resolve them by ourselves, nor can others,–people like us, wretches like us. "A sense of *powerlessness* accompanies every serious experience in our lives. This sense of powerlessness generates *solitude*. True solitude does not come from being physically alone but from the discovery that a fundamental problem of ours cannot find its solution in us or in others. We can well say that the sense of solitude is borne in the very heart of every serious commitment to our own humanity."[10]

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[9] L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1997, pp. 36-37.
[10] L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2006, p. 55.

What needs to be answered is precisely this sense of powerlessness, which ultimately generates the solitude that each of us experiences in life. Without this answer, all the rest is distraction.

We are alone with our need, documented in many questions that have emerged in these months. Now, if this is our situation, what enables us to stand? In other words, what is the essential thing we need to live as human beings, according to all the depth of our need? What is the essential *for us*? There is no other way to capture what is the essential for us than discovering in experience whence we expect to find the answer to the need of living.

It would be easy, even obvious or taken for granted–because of the education we have received–to answer immediately that for us the essential is Christ, the presence of Christ. But we cannot get off so easily. A mechanical answer will not suffice. In fact, observing ourselves in action, we often must yield to the evidence that for us the essential is elsewhere.

The criterion for discovering it comes from the Gospel. "Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."[11] Here you see the distance between the intention that Christ be the essential of life, and the discovery that often in experience this is not the case. Here the difference between intention and experience emerges. Thus, we can discover that even in good faith, the essential has become something else, and is no longer Christ; we have shifted to something else, maybe even in the name of that essential that continues nonetheless to be quoted in our discourses.

It is crucial to grasp what we are saying, so as not to immediately reduce everything to the problem of our mistakes or daily frailties, our instances of moral incoherence. In talking about the distance between intention and experience, the core is not primarily coherence, how often we err, but what defines us even when we err; the core issue is the content of our self-awareness, our real substance, what we actually pursue and love in action, what is essential for us. In fact, one can be incoherent and yet be highly focused on the essential, like a child–described so often by Fr. Giussani–who misbehaves mightily, drives his mother to distraction a thousand times a day, but at the center of his gaze there is no one but his mother. Heaven help anyone who tried to take him away from her! He would wail and scream; he would be inconsolable.

Thus the gap between intention and experience has nothing to do with the gap between theory and application, but indicates that the content of awareness and of affection has *de facto* become another, regardless of ethical coherence or incoherence. It is as if without realizing it at times we have

[11] *Mt.* 6:21.

shifted, oriented our gaze elsewhere; we have become centered on something else (the essential has not been denied, but has been transformed into an *a priori*, a postulate in the back of our minds that does not define who we are, our personal identity and our face in the world today).

We have seen this demonstrated particularly clearly at certain moments of our history, as we will see tomorrow. For now, let it suffice to recall what Fr. Giussani told us, and as we repeated in the Beginning Day: "the project had taken the place of presence,"[12] without our realizing it.

What enables us to look at everything–even our mistakes, even this lack of self-awareness–without fear, free from the temptation to justify ourselves (like the publicans, who went to Jesus because only with Him could they be themselves, without having to reject anything of themselves; this is why they sought Him out, why they needed to return to Him–to be able to be themselves, finally)? The certainty of His covenant, the certainty that He will take even our mistakes as an opportunity to make us discover how different He is, who He is. The certainty of this love defines the covenant that God made with us, as the prophet Isaiah reminds us: "Thus says the LORD: 'In a time of favor I answer you, on the day of salvation I help you, I form you and set you as a covenant for the people, to restore the land and allot the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners: Come out! To those in darkness: Show yourselves! Along the ways they shall find pasture, on every bare height shall their pastures be. They shall not hunger or thirst, nor shall the scorching wind or the sun strike them; For He who pities them leads them and guides them beside springs of water. I will cut a road through all my mountains, and make my highways level. See, some shall come from afar, others from the north and the west, and some from the land of Syene.' Sing out, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth, break forth into song, you mountains. For the Lord comforts His people and shows mercy to His afflicted."[13]

Despite this preference, we challenge the Lord with our murmuring. "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.'"[14] How often we think this! He could react to this provocation like us, with our usual reactivity, getting angry, but He surprises us with an entirely original, irreducible presence. Instead of letting Himself be determined by our murmuring, by what we say or think about Him, He takes the opportunity to show once again how different He is, challenging our reason in

[12] L. Giussani, "From Utopia to Presence," op. cit., p. VII.
[13] *Is.* 49:8-13.
[14] *Is.* 49:14.

an astounding way: "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you."[15]

What would our life be if we could not hear these words over and over? This is His faithfulness, that enables us to look at everything, that enables us to let His very presence enter our life. Only His presence can increasingly reduce the distance between intention and experience, because He makes possible an experience of unity of living like the one the publicans had in meeting Jesus. This is why they kept returning to Him, as we also return, hoping to hear "that word that […] freed me," "because of the hope that He […] awoke in me."[16]

This is the unity of life that we all desire. "Adults are those who have attained unity of life, awareness of their destiny, of their meaning, energy of adherence."[17] This is what we all desire: this unity of life. Only in this way can we be truly ourselves, can our presence be useful for ourselves and others. As Fr. Giussani reminded us at a certain point in our history–it was 1977–, "In these past years we have been truly victims of the Movement's presumption to be the cure-all for the Church and Italy. But […] if the Movement is not the experience of faith as something that solves my problems, illuminates them, it cannot be proposed to others, either."[18] This is why he desired that faith become an experience, and why he always taught us that the road for reaching it is none other than for faith to become personal. "'The time has come for the personalization […] of the new event born into the world, of the factor of new protagonism of history, which is Christ, in communion with those whom the Father has given Him.' Giussani underlined that it is a problem of experience, 'The first thing we have to help each other with is to confirm that the beginning of everything is experience […]. The concept of experience is to live something, judging it'."[19]

If faith does not become personal experience, there is no mission, and we end up presumptuously becoming judges of everything. The proposal

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[15] *Is.* 49:15.

[16] Cf. C. Chieffo, "Ballata dell'uomo vecchio" [Ballad of the Old Man] and "Il monologo di Giuda" [Judas' Monologue], *Canti* [*Songs*], Società Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, Milano 2014, p. 218 and p. 230.

[17] FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION (FCL), *Archivio storico del Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione [Historical Archive of the Movement of Communion and Liberation]* (AMCL), fasc. CL/81, "Consiglio 18/19 giugno 1977" [Council June 18/19, 1977].

[18] CL Center, Milan, November 17, 1977, CL Archive. (FCL, AMCL, fasc. CL/85, "Centro 17.11.77. Sintesi").

[19] A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani* [*Life of Fr. Giussani*], Rizzoli, Milan 2013, p. 762.

passes through my changed humanity, and "the impetus of mission is gratitude; otherwise, it is presumption."[20] This makes us understand that the only adequate position today is to be witnesses, as the Pope said. Again, Fr. Giussani reminds us of the reason. "In a society like this, nothing new can be created, if not with a life: no structure, organization, or initiative will suffice. Only a different and new life can revolutionize structures, initiatives, relationships–in short, everything. And life is mine, irreducibly mine."[21] What a beautiful phrase!

What is needed is life! Dialectic is not enough. Yet there are those who think that witness, that is, life, the experience of living, is the choice of "quitters," something inward-looking, something to justify our lack of commitment. Nothing could be more mistaken. Bearing witness is actually the most demanding choice, because it requires a commitment that is more all-encompassing than any other option. It asks everything of us, not just a snippet of time that we decide to dedicate to some project. Bearing witness is for people who want to live up to their own humanity; it requires we be present with all of ourselves as we reach out to others, bringing them a newness lived in such a radical way that all their humanity is re-awakened, person to person. "God saves man through man,"[22] we read in School of Community. All my humanity is demanded. All of our friend Natascia's pain for her son was demanded to prompt the creation of a new ward for neonatal pathologies; a pro-life conference would have made no difference. Bearing witness does not mean standing on the sidelines or withdrawing from the battle. It demands the commitment of all my humanity: energy, affection, intelligence, time, and unity of life. This is anything but spiritualism! Anything but delegating to some expert, passing the buck!

Therefore, insisting that faith become personal means insisting on the source of the difference that makes us a presence, capable of an original witness in society. Who does not feel this need? We can shoulder the responsibility to which the Pope called us only if we do not take for granted the subject (that is, claiming we are already witnesses just because we say so), but choose to travel the road that will make us witnesses according to the design that God wants. Giussani says that the Movement is what helps us in this, period. It helps you to be yourself.

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[20] CL Center, Milan, November 17, 1977, CL Archive. (FCL, AMCL, fasc. CL/85, "Centro 17.11.77. Sintesi".)

[21] "Movimento, 'regola' di libertà" [Movement, 'Rule' of Freedom], edited by O. Grassi, in *CL-Litterae communionis*, n. 11, November 1978, p. 44.

[22] L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1998, p. 103.

"The journey to truth is an experience." It has always been this way. "In the concept of development, Newman's own life plays a role. That seems to become visible to me in his well-known words in his famous *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*: '…Here on earth, to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often'." Ratzinger gives us this quote, and continues, "Throughout his entire life, Newman was a person converting, a person being transformed, and thus he always remained and became ever more himself. Here the figure of St. Augustine comes to my mind, with whom Newman was so associated. When Augustine was converted in the garden at Cassiciacum he understood conversion according to the system of the revered master Plotin and the Neo-Platonic philosophers. He thought that his past sinful life would now be definitively cast off; from now on the convert would be someone wholly new and different, and his further journey would be a steady climb to the ever purer heights of closeness to God. It was something like that which Gregory of Nyssa described in his *Ascent of Moses*: 'Just as bodies, after having received the first push downwards, fall effortlessly into the depths with ever greater speed, so, on the contrary, the soul which has loosed itself from earthly passion rises up in a rapid upward movement… constantly overcoming itself in a steady upward flight.' Augustine's actual experience was a different one. He had to learn that being a Christian is always a difficult journey with all its heights and depths. The image of *ascensus* is exchanged for that of *iter*, whose tiring weight is lightened and borne up by moments of light which we may receive now and then. Conversion is the *iter*–the roadway of a whole lifetime. And faith is always 'development,' and precisely in this manner it is the maturation of the soul to truth, to God, who is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves."[23]

This maturation occurs through all the circumstances of life. "The world's turmoil is an instrument of God's call to authenticity and to truth of life for everyone, but in particular for the Christian, who is like the sentinel on the battlefield of the world." At times this turmoil shakes us terribly. It is normal, as Fr. Giussani reminds us. "Deep down, as a law, we can't avoid this bewilderment. 'The world will laugh, and you will cry.'"[24]

All that we have said makes us aware of our need. This awareness is key for a gesture like the one we are beginning, because the Spiritual Exercises

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[23] J. Ratzinger, Presentation by His Eminence Card. Joseph Ratzinger on the Occasion of the First Centenary of the Death of Card. John Henry Newman, Rome, April 28, 1990.

[24] L. Giussani, The Long March To Maturity, in *Traces-Litterae communionis,* Vol. 10, no. 3 (March 2008), p. 33.

are precisely a gesture. Therefore, the Spiritual Exercises are not only the lesson and the assembly, but also the silence, songs, prayer, and above all, the asking. We can reduce our participation in a gesture like this, each of us using our own criteria to pick and choose what to participate in or what to follow, out of the whole packet! As if we were at the doctor's office, but we were the ones to decide what medicine to take. Instead, the more aware we are of our need, the more everything we will live these days, and all the sacrifices we will make, will become a cry, a cry for the Lord to have mercy on us. Let's ask Him to!

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: Widsom 2:1.12-22; Psalm 33 (34); Jn. 7:1-2.10:25-30

HOMILY BY FR. STEFANO ALBERTO

This second chapter of the *Book of Wisdom* describes with extreme precision the dynamic by which everything is concentrated in a hostility against Christ: "he boasts that God is his father. Let us see whether his words be true." We will not enter into the deep truth of our life if we do not acknowledge what School of Community calls "instinctive resistance" to Christ, true God, true man. This resistance of ours does not manifest itself in open rebellion. Rather, it takes on the form of those who, before Jesus, said: "We know where he is from; we know him." We need to stay alert, beg, and learn, not to fall prey to this resistance in which we already know everything and no longer feel the need to let ourselves be seized. In the face of this resistance, which is the most insidious kind, because it suffocates the thirst for happiness and the awareness of being entirely dependent on the Father, Christ responds precisely with the bond that He is with the Father, the foundation of His irreducibility. "I did not come on my own, but the one who sent Me …. Is true. I know Him, because I Am from Him." We who have encountered Him await to know Him, not for what we already know, but for what now, in these days, we receive from Him. We who, just as we are, desire to press on to make Him our own, if we are loyal and human with ourselves, know well that we need to be seized by Him. And this being seized by Him has a human form: it is a place, a history, a human presence, with a face and a voice.

Saturday, April 5, morning

During entrance and exit:
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Concerto for piano and orchestra no. 20 in D minor,, K 466
Clara Haskil, piano
Igor Markevitch–Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux
"Spirto Gentil" n. 32, Philips

Don Pino. "It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ."[25]

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ **FIRST MEDITATION**
Julián Carrón

The essential thing for living

1. The essential thing: the first leap of the heart

"If I look into the depths of your tender eyes the world and all its hell are wiped away."[26] Is it possible that looking deep into someone's eyes, hell can be wiped away? In order to understand this line you need to have seen vibrating in the eyes of a person the Being that makes him exist now. In order for hell not to be wiped away just sentimentally, those eyes must vibrate in such a way that they do not allow me to remain at the appearance of the vibration, but in a way that push me to see in the vibration of those eyes the Being that makes them, that makes them vibrate this way. So often

[25] *Phil.* 3:12.
[26] V. Heredia, "Ojos de cielo," *Canti*, op. cit., pp. 295-296. "If I look into the depths of your tender eyes the world and all its hell fade away. The world fades away and I discover heaven when I plunge into your tender eyes. *Eyes of heaven*, *eyes of heaven, don't abandon me in full flight, eyes of heaven, eyes of heaven. all my life for this dream, eyes of heaven, eyes of heaven.* If I forgot what was true, if I moved away from what is most sincere, your eyes of heaven would remind me if I forgot what was true. *Eyes of heaven*… If the sun that lights my way waned one day and a dark night overcame my life, your eyes of heaven, your sincere eyes, would illuminate me, would be my path and guide. *Eyes of heaven*…"

we remain at the appearance. Just think of what happened to us as we sang. Was the hell in front of our eyes wiped away? Were our fears wiped away, our incapacity, our powerlessness, that fear of the void that constantly emerges in our life? If none of these things happened, if only the sentimental repercussion has remained, this will not last long; it means that we have not grasped the true meaning of what we sang, that we did not participate in the experience that gave life to this song. Instead, those who participated in it will have had the experience of discovering "heaven when I plunge into your tender eyes." Only from taking this plunge can the entreaty emerge: "Eyes of heaven, eyes of heaven, don't abandon me in full flight."

"If I forgot what was true," if then I were incapable of seeing the truth of things, "if I moved away from what is most sincere…," what would I need? I would need your eyes to remind me. But even more, "If the sun that lights my way waned one day and a dark night overcame my life," if I found myself in the deepest darkness, what would I need? I would need your eyes of heaven to illuminate me, because "your sincere eyes […] are my path and guide." When was the last time in our life that, looking into the eyes of those we most love, this happened? Not as "poetry," not as "literature," not as pure sentimentalism! As fact, as lived experience, because herein lies the whole method.

When I was a high school teacher I used to give this example: if a child went to an amusement park with his parents, he would be completely enraptured with all the attractions there; everything would be fantastic and, wholly attracted, he wouldn't stop saying: "Look, Dad! Look at this!" Every attraction would make his heart leap, everything he saw would thrill him. But if in a moment of distraction he were to get separated from his parents, and were to find himself alone amidst all the confusion, in the faceless crowd, what would happen? Everything in front of him, with all its beauty, would change into a threat and he would begin to cry. Everything is there like before, the attractions are the same as before, but the child would cry and would no longer care about those things he saw. Everything would become a hell. What would make him forget that hell in the blink of an eye? Simply being reunited with his parents would restore everything, because in the relationship with them he would return to seeing reality as it is.

So then, the words of the song do not express sentimentalism, but describe something real. Each of us, if we could not continually encounter a gaze, have a certain relationship, would be unable to look at reality correctly. If, for a moment, I were to distance myself from you, my companion in life, I would no longer see reality; it would be a dark night, just as it was for that child. But if "a dark night overcame my life," what would I need?

Once more, I would need "eyes of heaven" that illuminate it, a gaze, a relationship.

"To lighten this heavy load of our days, this solitude that we all have, lost islands, to avoid this sensation of losing everything,"[27] what do I need? "I only need you to be here with your clear eyes." But what clear eyes is he talking about? What clear eyes must be encountered, to avoid the sensation of losing everything? What clear eyes do I need to overcome the solitude we all experience? What clear eyes do I need in order not to lose "the angel of longing"? This is truly striking, because more often than not, being with another is the same as losing this longing. Therefore, a presence must happen that not only does not extinguish longing, but inflames it, revives the desire to be with it. Is it possible? "To discover […] life," what gaze must we encounter? "To understand that all is beautiful and costs nothing," that everything is a gift, what gaze need we encounter? "To discover and understand"[28] will just any gaze suffice? No, neither the gaze of your spouse, nor that of your friends is enough. What is needed is the gaze of a presence capable of staying before all the challenges, a presence that documents the experience that nothing beautiful that happens in life is lost. What is needed is a relationship that does not extinguish the fire of longing, but fuels it. Do these eyes exist? Does this gaze exist in reality?

"*Aconteceu*."[29] It happened, when people least expected it. A fact happened in history that introduced this gaze forever.

How do we know?

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[27] V. Heredia, "Razón de vivir," *Canti*, op. cit., pp. 296-297. "To decide whether to continue giving this blood to the earth, this heart that beats day and night, to continue walking under the sun of these deserts, to reaffirm that I am alive in the midst of so many dead, to decide, to continue, to reaffirm and realize things, I only need you to be here with your clear eyes. *Ah, fire of love and guide, reason for living my life. Ah, fire of love and guide, reason for living my life.* To lighten this heavy load of our days, this solitude that we all have, lost islands, to avoid this sensation of losing everything, to understand the road to follow and to choose the way. To lighten, to avoid, to understand and realize all I need is for you to be here with your clear eyes. *Ah, fire of love*… To combine beauty and light without losing distance, to be with you without losing the angel of longing, to discover that life passes without asking anything of us, and to understand that all is beautiful and costs nothing, to combine, to be with you, to discover and understand, all I need is for you to be here with your clear eyes *Ah, fire of love*…"

[28] *Ibid*.

[29] A. Calcanhotto – P. Cavalcanti, "Aconteceu," from the CD *A Fábrica do poema*, 1994. "It happened when nobody expected it; it happened without bells ringing; it happened differently from the stories the novels usually tell us. It happened without there being stars in the sky; it happened without a ray of moonlight. Our love arrived very softly, slowly spread itself, and lingered, then stayed. It happened without the world giving thanks, without roses blooming, without a song of praise; it happened without any drama. Time simply made its bed as in every great love."

Fr. Giussani wrote years ago: "The most beautiful thought to which I have been abandoning myself in these months is imagining how Mary Magdalene's heart leapt the first time, and how this first leap for her it did not mean 'I'll leave all my lovers,' but it meant falling in love with Christ. For Zacchaeus, when his heart leapt for the first time, it didn't mean, 'I'll give away all my money,' but it meant the lovestruck surprise at that Man. [So then] That God became one of us, a companion, is absolute gratuitousness; indeed, it is called grace." The most wondrous gratuitousness is that God has become my companion on the road, just as Zacchaeus realized, and as Mary Magdalene realized. Therefore, "His Presence reverberates [in me], in us, as wonderstruck gratitude."[30] How grateful I am to have a companion who lightens the load of my days, of my solitude, who frees me from the sensation of losing everything! This is the reason Mary Magdalene and Zacchaeus were seized, taken. They immediately felt attracted, attached to Him. They were poor wretches like us, sinners, wounded by living, but nothing precluded them from being seized, taken. Nothing prevented that leap in their hearts that filled them with boundless gratitude. For that leap of the heart nothing was needed, no precondition; all that was needed was for it to happen! It just has to happen, and we are struck and seized, because it is what each of us desires, what we await expectantly every second. "That 'burning of our hearts within us' as One speaks to us 'on the way.'"[31]

What must have happened to that woman, Mary Magdalene, that she could not help but desire to seek Him every day, every night? "On my bed at night I sought him whom my heart loves"[32]–my heart's beloved.

This is how the Mystery burns through all the stages, all the distances, all the distractions, all the mistakes. None of these things can impede the Mystery from turning to them and making them fall in love. It is not sentimentalism. The bond that Christ establishes with them is not sentimentalism. Sentimentalism would not be capable of seizing them like this. It is a relationship that makes them become themselves, that certainly entails a sentimental reverberation, like anything that enters our horizon,[33] but its scope goes far beyond sentiment and introduces them to an experience of themselves that no sentimentalism could dream of reaching.

The way Jesus is with them is not sentimentalism, nor is it a reproof, a condemnation, keeping at a distance; no, it is an embrace, a tenderness, a

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[30] Retreat of the Memores Domini on May 24-26, 1985, *pro manuscripto*, p. 15.
[31] Cf. *Lk.* 24:32.
[32] *Song of Songs*, 3:1.
[33] Cf. L. Giussani, "Third Premise," in *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., pp. 23-32.

passion for their lives, through which He makes them finally become themselves–they who did not know what it meant to truly be themselves, what it meant to be women and men. In this way, a new way of being human enters the world, a new way of living life, of being present in reality, a way that all–consciously or unconsciously–desire, yearn for, but are unable to reach by their own efforts, with their own imagination, with their own energy.

"It is the discovery of the *person* that enters the world with Jesus."[34] In these times, this line of School of Community gains all its historic importance. Christianity is an event, a present fact, so present you can touch it with your hand, as we have seen reading chapter eight of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim.* This chapter is the documentation in the present of the existence of those eyes that you need to meet in order to live; it is the testimony of Fr. Giussani, two thousand years later, that these eyes still exist, present in reality, otherwise he would never have been able to write it. Eyes that are irriducible to just ourselves, our sentiments, our reactions; eyes that cannot be manipulated by anyone, because they introduce the gaze of a Presence that is totally different from us. Only those who have seen them, those who have come across them, can answer the decisive question: "Who is Jesus?"

Only if we allow this gaze to enter can we existentially understand who Jesus is. By experiencing, in awe, a "surplus" of humanity, we begin to understand who Jesus really is. This explains why Mary Magdalene and Zacchaeus felt that surge in their hearts that caused them to be glued to Jesus from the very first day, like John and Andrew. "But that exceptional impression, that initial wonder, what was it made up of, psychologically? The initial wonder was a *judgment* which immediately became an *attachment.*" It was an unparalleled experience of falling in love. "It was a judgment that was like a glue; *a judgment that glued them*. Thus every day more and more glue was applied, and they could no longer pull themselves away! […] Looking at Him, a marvel of appreciation grows in you that attaches you to Him."[35] It is a judgment, not a sentiment. So then, you understand why their entire lives were spent pressing on to make Him their own. Limping, erring a thousand times, but without ever leaving. This is the same unique tenderness that He awakened in us through Fr. Giussani. We touched it with our hands through his testimony.

Who we are, and our impact on history, depends on this.

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[34] L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit., p. 86.
[35] L. Giussani, *L'attrattiva Gesù [The Attraction that is Jesus]*, BUR, Milan 1999, p. IX.

Imagine those fishermen from Galilee who arrived with "just" those new eyes in the Rome of those times, with the standard of living we all know about. What must have prevailed in their hearts? What must they have had at heart when they arrived in Rome? If John and Andrew arrived in our world now, what would dominate in them? What would be the essential for them? What would they have at heart to communicate to everyone in this moment, in the face of the challenges of our day? Would not their only concern perhaps be the one they had seen in Jesus, and therefore to bear witness to the gaze that had struck them, to let that gaze enter into every circumstance and every relationship?

In Jesus' times, as now, the true challenge is the emergence of the person. This explains Christ's passion for the human person. Both those times and ours are times of "evangelical wretchedness," and today as then, the essential is needed, that is, His Presence happening again here and now, generating that surge of the heart.

Fr. Giussani did nothing other than bear witness to this. At the end of his life he summarized with these words what his attempt was, what he wanted to do during all of his existence, "Not only did I have no intention of 'founding' anything, but I believe that the genius of the Movement that I saw coming to birth lies in having felt the urgency to proclaim the need to return to the elementary aspects of Christianity, that is to say, the passion of the Christian fact as such in its original elements, and nothing more."[36] This was the essential for him. Christianity is this event. Its sign is the happening of the "I," made possible by the experience of Christ present in a humanity that is different.

"I am writing after the repercussion provoked in me by attending the CLU Equipe. The first thing I have to say is that I arrived with a contribution I had prepared and wanted to give, but for reasons of time could not do so, as was the case for many others. However, working with you, seeing what was happening before my eyes through the other witnesses and your paternal gaze on each of us, so deepened the judgment that I had begun to give in the face of what happened to me, that I couldn't help exclaiming to myself, as I was seated there, 'But this is Christ happening!' In fact, what was happening was what Fr. Giussani calls in School of Community 'a gaze that reveals the human,' or better, a gaze that takes into consideration all the factors, that 'saves' all the factors of human experience–the greatest sign, as you told us today, of the presence of Christ." To accept Him, it is enough to

[36] L. Giussani, "Letter to John Paul II on the 50th Anniversary of the birth of Communion and Liberation, in *Traces-Litterae communionis*, Vol. 6, No. 4, April 2004, p. 2.

be like children. "Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."[37]

How do I know that Christ has happened and I have accepted Him? I know when His eyes become mine, to the point that I can look into the eyes of any other person all the way to their inception, to see vibrating in them the Being that makes them.

An Other lives in me. "Living in the flesh, I am part of an Event that makes me capable of a new intelligence, a more profound and truer understanding of my circumstances. What does it mean," wrote Fr. Giussani, "to look at a girl's face according to the flesh? It means that it's all just a matter of whether I like her or not, whether she's to my taste or not, whether I find her hard or easy to be with. Whereas 'Though living in the flesh, I live in faith' means I approach my relationship with her in faith in the Son of God, in my adherence to Christ."[38] Christ as a present fact opens wide my gaze, not Christ remembered nominalistically, as a pure name, but as a present fact, just as for a child the presence of his parents constitutes his gaze, grounds his way of looking at reality. Neither slogans nor strategies suffice. What is needed is that the presence of Christ be so real, determine me so much, determine the depths of my eyes so much, that I can look at the other in a true way. "So that girl, insofar as she is attractive,"– Fr. Giussani excludes nothing–"is the sign through which I am invited to adhere in the flesh to the being of things, to get down to the reality of things, right down to where they are made."[39] How much we lose when He is missing! The eyes of anyone can wipe away hell, if I look at them with the openness that Christ present gives me. We need to verify this in reality.

2. The challenge of circumstances and the journey ahead

Who is Jesus? What is the essential for us?

After an experience like the one we have just described, we too would respond like Peter to the question about the essential, "But who do you say that I am?"[40] As Pope Francis recently explained, Peter "was certainly the most courageous one that day, when Jesus asked his disciples: 'but who do you say that I am?'. For he responded decisively: 'You are the Christ.' […]

[37] *Mk.* 10:15.
[38] L. Giussani – S. Alberto – J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2010, p. 55.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Mt.* 16:15.

Surely, we will respond as Peter did, as we learned in the catechism: you are the Son of the living God, you are the Redeemer, you are the Lord!". But, the Pope continued, once "Jesus began to explain all that would happen to him: the Son of man would have to suffer many things," Peter was caught off balance. "Peter most certainly did not like this talk. He thought: 'You are the Christ! Conquer and let's move ahead!'." For Peter "did not understand the path of suffering" that Jesus indicated. So much so, the Gospel tells us, that Peter "took Him, and began to rebuke Him." He was "so pleased with having responded, 'you are the Christ', that he felt he had the strength to rebuke Jesus."[41]

We too, like Peter, are not spared challenges after that surge of the heart. We see it wherever the Movement is present. As soon as I began the assembly with the CL university students in the U.S., one of them asked me, "How is it possible not to lose all the beautiful things that happen in life?" It is the same question as in the song, how to "avoid this sensation of losing everything"?[42] In Brazil, a young woman who works in contact with suffering in a hospital, encouraged by her colleagues to distract herself and not give too much importance to the pain, because sooner or later one gets used to it, asked, "How can one live in the face of this heart-rending pain?" Our friends in Venezuela are challenged by a social and political situation that is becoming increasingly dire; those in Argentina are grappling with the historic dramas of their recent past; those in Mexico have to deal with a violence that every year provokes more deaths than a war; those of Uruguay have to face the legalization of marijuana as an answer to the drama of living; those in the U.S. are being put to the test by the harshness of the economic situation; our friends in Russia and in Ukraine are challenged by the crisis created by the events in Crimea; the Spaniards find themselves before a new bill on abortion; many of us in every part of the world find ourselves living in contexts that are totally extraneous to Christianity. In addition to the challenges of the recession, the emergency in education, the lack of work, the progressive dissolution of society (as documented in the difficulty of married people to live their relationship, in the many people who are upset about the problems of educating their children or about hardships in life), another challenge has been added, one that many experience as burning, that of "new rights," symptom of a profound cultural and social travail, of a

[41] Francis, *Morning meditation: "Who do you say that I am?,"* Domus Sanctae Marthae, February 20, 2014.
[42] V. Heredia, "Razón de vivir", *Canti [Songs]*, op. cit., p. 296.

way of conceiving of the human person that is asserting itself today, and that is spreading more and more. In short, we have no lack of challenges.

They are a provocation for each of us and for each community throughout the world. The beautiful thing is that they are challenges we all share, that nobody can avoid. And each of us, in fact, is already responding–in dialogues with colleagues, friends, at home–to these burning questions that have the value of making us come out of our dens, pushing us to discover what is the essential for us. As we said yesterday, the essential comes to the surface when we observe ourselves in action. So then, in front of the challenges we find ourselves facing, we can ask ourselves: in my answer, in my attempt, what has emerged, what have I said of myself, what have I discovered in myself as essential? What did I feel was important to say? What answer did I give to all these circumstances? We have an urgent need to clarify for ourselves the appropriate way of staying in front of these things.

The first thing to understand is the nature of this provocation.

These challenges are a call for us, as always. "In Church history," Giussani says, "it has always been this way: the commitment demonstrated by the world–which, no matter how partial and sectarian, expresses an urgent need or an aspect of life–provokes the renewal of consciousness, the crisis and renewal of consciousness within the authentic Christian people. God uses everything that happens. […] Everything that happens, God permits for the maturation of those He has chosen."[43] In the midst of all the complexity of the situation, many feel lost, bewildered, and not a few feel frightened. The more we feel the gravity of the challenges, the more there grows in us the urgent need to do something, to give our contribution, the more urgently we want to know what to do, what initiative to take.

However each of us has reacted to the provocations of reality, we will have been able to verify what Pope Francis said about Peter, "to respond to that question which we all hear in our hearts–Who is Jesus for us?–what we have learned and studied in the Catechism does not suffice." Certainly, "it is important to study and to know it, but it is not enough," the Holy Father insisted, because to truly know Him, "we need to travel the path that Peter travelled."[44]

This means that for us, as for the first ones, the surge of the heart is not the end of the story: life goes on with all its provocations. We, too, can respond like Peter to Christ's question, that is, identify in Him the essential

[43] L. Giussani, "*The Long March to Maturity*," op. cit., p. 22..
[44] Francis, *Morning meditation: "But who do you say that I am?,"* Domus Sanctae Marthae, February 20, 2014.

thing for living. But many times, we too get shifted away from the essential, even though we have acknowledged it. Therefore, if we do not take a journey, we will get lost like Peter: "Faith is also a knowledge bound to the passage of time, for words take time to be pronounced, and it is a knowledge assimilated only along a journey of discipleship."[45]

Therefore, the question about the essential is not just rhetorical, something to distract us a bit this morning. It is crucial for responding the questions we face–how can one live, what are we doing here in the world?–We see it when the challenges bite our flesh and keep us from looking at them as spectators.

"The other day," a friend from Spain told me, "we were going together to one of the marches to defend the Spanish popular government's attempt to pass a law less favourable to abortion. We were walking together at the march, and I was talking with a friend who has three children and unexpectedly learned that a fourth is on the way. Their circumstances are ideal: he loves his wife, they have a solid marriage, they don't have any particular financial difficulties, they belong to the Movement, they are Catholic, everything is right. He told me, 'You know, the first reaction when my wife came to me with the result of the pregnancy test was to say, *It's not true! It can't be true!* because now it's hard for me, I don't have the energy, it changes all my plans…'. And he told me, 'Right now, we're participating in a march against abortion, but the natural tendency of rejection is in me too, even though I have been accompanied, educated, supported by a companionship for twenty years. What must it be like for a girl who isn't married, who has no money? What will a woman think–who is alone, or not alone, a girl of 18–who sees the pregnancy test result, if not, *Since I don't know how to deal with this thing, I'll eliminate it, because it seems easier?*' It was beautiful because we talked about it a lot and I told him, 'Look, without this awareness it is unjust for us to be at this march, because otherwise we are here to defend Catholic values but we don't understand what they mean in life…'."

The provocations do not decrease even when we form a reduced idea of the need of the other. Rather, the other's rebellion against our attempt to reduce his desire makes the question even more urgent: what are we doing here in the world? "We are a group of friends and we help people find work. We do it with a very simple method, by accompanying them! You just need to meet the better ones a couple of times and then, with their "I" awakened, they themselves find a job right away. But the more critical

[45] Francis, Encyclical letter *Lumen fidei, 29.*

ones, those who are not capable of moving on their own, we accompany them one by one and stay with them as long as it takes for them to find a job" But they do not always find a job. "Three years ago, among many like these we met a fifty-year-old disabled man, in a wheelchair, accompanied by his mother. During the interview, among other things, he said he knew how to type on a computer, so I said right away that I could find him a job he could do at home. But he, 'bringing out' all of his 'I,' told me he wanted to get out of the house! At that point I hugged him: he had an infinite heart like mine, while I had already reduced him to his wheelchair." Through one detail, all the nature of one's need emerges: that man would not want to settle for less.

Another example. A girl wrote a group of friends that when her cousin told her she was expecting a child and was doing a series of tests to make sure it was healthy, she asked, "Well, what's the use of knowing beforehand if the child is healthy?". Her cousin's answer was cold. "If it has any problems, I'm getting rid of it." I'm getting rid of it! "They were the longest minutes of my life. I couldn't think of anything. I was frozen, petrified. I couldn't talk. I managed to put together a few words to say goodbye. I felt inconsolably sad. Then I thought of *Page One* […]: 'Is it possible to stay inside circumstances with the entire human measure of the dramatic nature of life, in the light of the School of Community?' [Is that initial surge of the heart sufficient in the face of any challenge?] 'Here, each one of us must verify, independently of the opinion that we might have, whether or not the response that he gives to the provocation of reality is able to truly offer a response, to respond to the problem that provokes and challenges me.'" The girl concluded, "This is the issue! This is the road! In the pain, in the amount of questions raised by what I wrote you, in the desire to be able to stay even closer to my cousin in a more human, total, true, humble and discrete way, I desire to verify once again and now if it is true (and it is true) that Christ is the Rock, the one–the only one!–the Cornerstone; I want to know if the answer to the question: '*Quid animo satis?*': '*Est Vir qui adest*' is true (and it is true)."

These testimonies make us aware of the journey ahead. In fact, if we do not understand the importance of the provocations, if we do not grasp all the factors in play, we will make the same mistakes of the past.

3. A light from our history

In order to face today's challenges–cultural, social, political, and juridical–we do not start out from zero. We have the richness of a history, of a journey made in the company of Fr. Giussani. Therefore, to illuminate the current challenges, I thought it useful to look back at some moments of our history–1968 and the following years–in which the provocation and the pressure of circumstances were so strong as to cause many to stray. In those years, the presence of Fr. Giussani proved once again crucial. He helped us discover ourselves in action and realize what was truly the essential, notwithstanding our intentions, precisely because by becoming aware of all the factors, he did not reduce the dimensions of the problem–as instead we usually do. His judgments constitute charitable gestures toward us, and at the same time reveal all his authoritativeness, which kept us from ending up lost.

Fr. Giussani said, "For me, history is everything; I learned from history,"[46] that is, from experience. Reading Savorana's book, we are verifying just how true this is. Not even he was spared challenging circumstances.

In 1993 he was provoked by the words of a university student who said that some intellectuals complained that CL "was much better before […] 1976, when it threw itself into the political fray, when it engaged in ideological arguments, when it carried out its project, proposed its project in society, instead now…", said those intellectuals, "it is reduced to something pietistic."[47] You can read it in the next book of the Equipes that will be published this fall. To respond to this provocation, Giussani used a passage from the 1982 book, *Uomini senza patria [People Without a Homeland]*, in which he said, "All our activity, since Communion and Liberation was born, since 1970, […] all that we do [that we have done] is in order to have a homeland, to have a homeland in this world." Some will remember the passage: "I'm not saying it's not right. I am saying that we do it to have a homeland, and that we will not have this homeland."[48]

Why did this happen? To face the question, Giussani returned again to the vicissitudes of those years, "In 1968 and 1969 we found ourselves

[46] A. Savorana, Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani], op. cit., p. VIII.
[47] This refers to an Equipe contained in the book by L. Giussani, *In cammino (1993-1998) [On the Journey]*, in press with BUR.
[48] L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983) [People Without a Homeland]*, BUR, Milan 2008, p. 88.

as if we were playing an away game,"[49] thrown off-balance by the Marxist ideology and by its desire for liberation. Analogously, today we can find ourselves thrown off-balance by the turmoil and by the new anxiety for liberation, that for example are expressed by the demand for new rights, all of which derive from the sixties' ideologies. Each of them represents a modality, partial and often contradictory, through which one seeks satisfaction for needs that we have no trouble recognizing as profoundly human: the need for love, the desire for maternity and paternity, the fear of pain and death, the search for one's identity… Each of these new rights has its roots in the fabric that constitutes each human existence. This is the source of their attractiveness. The multiplication of individual rights expresses the expectation that the legal system can resolve human dramas and assure satisfaction of the infinite needs that dwell in the human heart.

"How did the Movement […] experience the blow [of this desire for liberation in the upheaval of 1968]? There was bewilderment […] a lost feeling characteristic of those who, carrying on their road and living their fundamental experience, are surprised by events that demand an inflection, a translation, an interpretation, and a decision on a level their own experience hasn't yet reached."[50]

In the face of this situation we asked each other, "'What must we do?' […] A little group of three or four university students rose up one day […] with a flyer, the first 'counterrevolutionary' flyer that came out, and perhaps because there were only four of them they weren't beaten up that time. The flyer was entitled 'Communion and Liberation' […]. What did that title mean?"[51]

1) First of all, it meant that liberation was a need of our heart, too. We too desired liberation, "There was a thread that bound us to the heart of everyone, because in crying out 'liberation, liberation,' Marxists too expressed a need of the heart, no matter how confused, obscured, dilapidated by an ideological discourse. But it was a desire of the heart."[52]

2) In the second place, that title meant that liberation belonged to the Christian announcement: Christ is the liberator. In fact, "Christ was made known to us as the liberator of the human person. It is the concept of the Redeemer: Christ the redeemer means Christ the liberator." Liberation

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[49] This refers to an Equipe contained in the volume by L. Giussani, *In cammino (1993-1998) [On the Journey]*, in press with BUR.
[50] L. Giussani, *The Long March to Maturity*, op. cit., p. 23-24.
[51] This refers to an Equipe contained in the book by L. Giussani, *In cammino (1993-1998) [On the Journey]*, in press with BUR.
[52] *Ibid.*

cannot come "from human toil; […] you cannot change with your own strength; in the world, liberation can only come from something that is already free. What is there in this world that is already free? Something that is not only of this world, that is in this world, but is not only of this world, that comes from outside, from beyond: Christ is the liberator. But where is Christ now? […] Christ becomes present through the companionship of those who recognize Him."[53]

But living the newness brought about by Christ in belonging to the Church, to the Movement, as a sign of change, did not seem enough. Building the Christian community seemed insufficient for the scope of the challenge; it was necessary to "do something." And the image of the "doing" was dictated by the approach of the others: it amounted to an action equal and opposite to that of the others–opposite in the sense of inspired by Christian principles.

Therefore, what was the way of responding to that bewilderment? "The bewilderment is overcome suddenly through an energy and a will to intervene, to operate, to act."[54] Fr. Giussani said, "We did an infinity of initiatives," the biggest being the great assembly at the Palalido, "seized by the anxiety to act, to achieve answers and operations that would show the others that acting according to Christian principles, we did better than they did. Only in this way could we have had a homeland for ourselves as well."[55]

We sought to overcome the bewilderment with a will to act, to operate, to do things, by "jumping headlong into following the world,"[56] striving and claiming to change things with our own strength, exactly like the others.

And what happened? A shift with unpredictable consequences. Without our realizing it, says Giussani, there was "the passage from one matrix to another […] by minimizing and making as abstract as possible the discourse and the type of experience in which you participated before." In this way, "the historic import of the Christian Fact was reduced or trivialized […] by minimizing its historic import, 'making it disappear;' as much as possible making its historic impact something fleeting."[57] These are all his words. So then, all that was involved in being in the Movement at the

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[53] *Ibid.*
[54] L. Giussani, *The Long March to Maturity*, op. cit., p. 24.
[55] This refers to an Equipe contained in the book by L. Giussani, *In cammino (1993-1998) On the Journey]*, in press with BUR.
[56] L. Giussani, *The Long March to Maturity*, op. cit., p. 26.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

time (the education we received, charitable work, the daily presence in schools and universities, the answer to different needs) was as if is it were emptied, was deemed insufficient. It was necessary to do something else to demonstrate that we too were interested in the fate of the world, that we knew how to give a more relevant contribution, precisely because we were Christians, that we had a better project and praxis. This position defined most of those who remained, not only those who decided to leave.

This reduction of the historic import of the Christian fact was not without consequences. Let's see how Fr. Giussani defined them.

"First: 'An efficientistic conception of Christian commitment, with accentuations of moralism.' Not *accentuations*–with wholesale *reduction* to moralism! Why should anyone remain Christian? Because Christianity pushes you to action, presses you to commitment, no other reason! […] Christians still have the right to remain in the world only to the degree in which they throw themselves into worldly action: it's ethical Christianity […]. Before the neediness of the world, there is an analysis of it, the theory to use in responding to it, and the response according to this theory. Everything is played out according to man's measure, and Christ has nothing to do with it; He has something to do with it only on a level beyond space and time, as a moral inspiration that is beyond space and time–'transcendental'."[58]

"Second consequence (and this is the gravest thing): the incapacity to 'culturalize' the discourse, to bring one's Christian experience to the level in which it becomes systematic and critical judgment, and thus a prompt for a modality of action. It's the Christian experience blocked in its potential for impact on the world, because an experience impacts the world only to the degree to which it reaches a cultural expression."[59]

"Third consequence: the theoretical and practical underestimation of authoritative experience, of authority. […] The Christian Fact–let's repeat it–has in the authoritative function created by Christ the geometric locus where the Mystery saves."[60]

"So then," Fr. Giussani summarized, "in the general bewilderment, […] [what dominated was] jumping headlong into following the world. One's own history, its contents of value, were minimized, interpreted as much as possible according to an abstract version of life, as excluded, ostracized from the possibility of impact on the historic contingent and

[58] *Ibid.* pp. 25, 27.
[59] *Ibid.* p. 25.
[60] *Ibid.* p. 26.

therefore of a true incarnation." Shortly before making this observation, referring to the overall attitude of those who participated in the protest movement in 1968, Fr. Giussani had said, "It's the naivety of me, the 'measure of all things,' the naivety of the man who says, 'Get out of the way and let me set things right.' It's the naivety of man as measure of all things, the naivety of self-love." And he exclaimed: "What melancholy! What melancholy we immediately felt, and how it's been deepening with the passage of the years!"[61]

In throwing themselves into doing things in the name of being Christians, to show that, being Christians, they had better answers to problems than those of the others, it could seem that Christ was the essential. But Fr. Giussani's judgment blows us away, as usual. "Our ideal is not at all what […] the press imagines. Our ideal is not at all that of having the right to stay on the earth and in society because we can answer the claims or needs or necessities of others, that men and women have. It is a good thing to respond to the needs and necessities of people, but we are not here for this. In 1976 in Riccione, when I got up to speak to two thousand university student leaders and didn't know what to say, and felt very ill at ease inside […] I said, 'We are not here for this, our goal as Christians is not this. We can very well join all the cooperatives in the world, we can join all the associations in the world and give our contribution to the common good through them, but Christianity is not an association of this kind. Christianity is not an organization to meet the needs of women and men.' […] This is the illusion that in every epoch has afflicted the human person and in it human person has always collapsed. It is an illusion; it is called utopia. […] [Why?] Because the human person cannot be capable of identifying, assimilating, putting together and being aware of the totality of the factors in play; something always eludes the human person."[62]

Without realizing it, we had shifted from Christ to utopia. Utopia had become the essential for us as well. We could continue saying that the essential was Christ, but in catching us in action, Fr. Giussani forced us to realize that we had already shifted (this was seen in the fact that we were unable to "identify and be aware of the totality of factors"). In fact, "it was as if the movement of Communion and Liberation, from 1970 onwards, had worked, built and fought for the values that Christ brought, while the

[61] *Ibid.* p. 26, 23.

[62] This refers to an Equipe contained in the book by L. Giussani, *In cammino (1993-1998) [On the Journey]*, in press with BUR.

fact of Christ, for us, for our persons and for all those who belonged to CL with us, 'remained parallel'."[63]

What led to this? A lack of awareness of the problem. In this lies our being "modern," children of the mentality that surrounds us. It is a problem of conception, of the consciousness we have of ourselves, of self-awareness, not of ethical coherence. Our being "modern" (but deep down "modernity" is a temptation of the soul of each person in every time) is documented in this shift of the center of gravity toward our religious, cultural and operative performance: the Presence, the Fact of Christ, becomes a theoretic *a priori*; an *a priori* that does not determine who we are, our gaze, the sense of our being in the world.[64]

The difficulty in uprooting this mentality from ourselves is documented in the consequent history of the Movement, recently described in *Page One.*[65] "The first conscious step was the Easter poster. […] The step that the Easter poster [*Christ, God's Companionship for Man,* 1982] invited everyone to take, and succeeded for many, was because […] it revealed that the issue is not all that we are doing, is not all hustle and bustle, is not our analysis of things, our point of view on thing inspired by Christian values. We went on for ten years, working on Christian values and forgetting Christ, not knowing Christ."[66]

Giussani denounced the shift of the center of gravity, the substitution of the essential with what we do–like all modern men–without realizing its absolute inadequacy with regard to the factors of the problem: "If we are so shamefully divided, so fragmented that even unity between man and woman is impossible and we can trust no one, if we are so cynical towards everyone and everything and so out of love with ourselves, how can we extract something from this mire in order to reconstruct the battered walls of our person–the cement for building new walls? […] Given this, our wounded situation, we cannot then say: 'Let's set ourselves to work to reconstruct humanity.' If we are so defeated, how can we possibly win? […] *Someone needs to come from outside*–can only come from outside–who sees

[63] L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)*, op. cit., p. 56.

[64] Cf. "The modern era, or rather, the contemporary era is the tragic documentation of what extremes man reaches in his claim to autonomy: the claim to make himself on his own, to fulfil himself on his own, to create himself on his own, to decide for himself, to have himself as center. This claim leads to the dissolution, the loss of freedom as originality of judgment on life: one becomes alienated in the common opinion, in the culture, in the opinions induced by the dominant culture" (L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria. 1982-1983*, op. cit., p. 265).

[65] J. Carrón, "Witnessing and Recounting," *Traces-Litterae communionis,* Vol. 16, No. 3, (March) 2014, pp. I-IV.

[66] L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)*, op. cit., pp. 88-89.

our battered dwelling place and re-builds the walls. […] This is the major difficulty as far as Catholicism, authentic Christianity, is concerned: it is through *something other*–that comes from outside–that man becomes himself. […] [But this] is immediately 'uninviting' because it opens the door, it welcomes something that does not correspond to our imagination or to our image of experience, and it appears abstract in its claim."[67]

This "something else," Christ, seems abstract to us. And since He seems too abstract to respond to the urgent need to change, to build, "we come to a halt […] in an impotent aspiring to find a remedy *or, in a fraudulent, lie-filled claim*. In other words, *we identify the remedy in our own head and according to our own desire to make good.*" Terrible! Giussani continues, "Thus is born the 'discoursing' on moral values, because discoursing on moral values suggests that the remedy to the dissolution lies in man's power of imagination and will: 'Let's work together. Together we can fix it'."[68] Modern to the marrow! He said it to us, not to others.

But why do we shift from Christ to this activism, this focus on "things to do"? Here the judgment of Fr. Giussani was even more surprising: we shift because our doing things seems less abstract than Christ as the basis for responding to our fears. In fact, he said, "it is an existential insecurity, a deep-rooted fear, that makes us view the things we do culturally and organizationally as our foundation, as the reason […] of our [own] substance."[69]

The most amazing thing is the conclusion Giussani draws from this. On our own, we would automatically identify these "activities"−through which we try to overcome our insecurity−as "presence." But nothing is further from reality then this. Listen to what he said, "In this way, all the cultural activity and all the organizational activity do not become expression of a new physiognomy, of a new person [they are an expression of our fear, of our insecurity]. If they were the expression of a new person, they could also not exist, when circumstances did not permit them, but that person would still stand. Instead, for many of our people present here today," he said, "if there were not these things, they would not stand, they would not know what they are here for, they would not know what to belong to: they do not stand, they do not have substance, because the substance of my person is the presence of an Other."[70] Here we see in all its clarity the relationship between what enables us to stand, the "essential," and what we are here in the world to do.

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[67] L. Giussani, *By Grace, Always*, in *He* is *if He Changes, 30Days* supplement, No. 7-8 1994, pp. 57-59.
[68] *Ibid.* p. 59.
[69] L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)*, op. cit., p. 97.
[70] *Ibid.*

Without recognizing and experiencing what responds to our existential insecurity, our basic fear, our presence is nothing other than the sign of the modern attempt to find substance in what we do. Therefore many people "would not know what they are here for,"[71] as Fr. Giussani observed, if there were not certain activities.

What is the ultimate "why" of this shift, to which I will return this afternoon? "The 'why,' in the final analysis, is the difficulty of Christian discourse, Christian experience, in becoming mature. […]. Impatience isn't the last trap, but the first. Christian experience will change the world; however, in order to change the world, the entire trajectory of history is required. […] Christian experience will change my life, but the trajectory of existence is required [of history; instead, we always look for a shortcut to get there first, thinking we are more intelligent!]. […] Christian experience doesn't satisfy man's feverish efficientistic drive to have *immediately*, to have, because this is the temptation of the Pharisees," he continued, "who said to Christ, 'Do a miracle the way we want it; send us thunderbolts from the sky. Send us thunderbolts, and we'll believe in you.' They established how the miracle should be,"[72] how reality should change, following Him. ("It wasn't because of the thirty pieces of silver […] But his kingdom never came"[73]). "This is truly the *pathos* underlying the drama of the time and the uncertainty, melancholy, weariness, and doubtfulness of today. At this point, you understand, you realize what faith means: believing, believing in Him; giving credence to the Christian Fact [that is, entrusting ourselves to a design, in the way of changing reality, that is His; but it seems too slow to us, not effective enough]. In certain moments, it's truly like dying to yourself. It's truly dying to yourself." Thus, "those who were saved, were saved through the sentiment of faithfulness to their own history, inasmuch as they had a clear idea–exclusively, one can say–of the power of the religious dimension as impact on the concrete contingent, therefore the presence of the Mystery as a factor that impacts on the human contingent and, secondly, they were saved through a loyal and clear rediscovery of giving proper credence to authority, of the historic function of authority."[74]

Perhaps now one understands better why Fr. Giussani asked himself in 1993, "So then, what are we here for?". If our purpose as Christians is not to take initiatives and build works to respond to needs, to resolve people's

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[71] *Ibid.*
[72] L. Giussani, *The Long March to Maturity*, op. cit., p 28.
[73] C. Chieffo, "Il monologo di Giuda" [Judas' Monologue], *Canti [Songs]*, op. cit., pp. 230-231.
[74] L. Giussani, *The Long March to Maturity*, op. cit., p. 30.

problems, what is it then? He shifts us back again, calling us to the essential, reaffirming the centrality of giving credence to the Christian fact. This is his response to the provocation: without the return to the origin, there is nothing to be done.

4. Return to the origin: "The Movement walks exclusively in virtue of the affection for Christ"

"So then, what are we here for?" In 1993 Fr. Giussani answered, "The reason is dual, and the second is the consequence of the first; one could say, immediate or contingent consequence of the first."[75] It is striking because, to clarify it, without mediation, he said, we "are here to say… we were walking along a road, we heard someone talking, an ideologist who was speaking, but who was more than an ideologist, because he was a serious fellow, called John the Baptist. We stayed there to listen to him. At a certain point, one who was there with us began to leave, and we saw John the Baptist stop to look at that fellow there who was leaving, and at a certain point he started to cry out, 'There is the Lamb of God.' Well, a prophet speaks strangely. But the two of us, who were there for the first time, we came from the countryside, from far away, we left the group and set out on the heels of that man, just like that, out of a curiosity that was not curiosity, out of a strange interest–who knows who put it inside us. He turned around at a certain point and said, 'What do you want?' and we replied, 'Where are you staying?', and He answered, 'Come and see.' We went and we stayed there all that day to watch Him speak, because the words He said we didn't understand, but He spoke in a certain way, He said those words in such a way, He had such a face that we stayed there to watch Him talk. When we left, because it was evening, we went home with another face, we saw our wives and our children in a different way; it was as if there were a veil between us and them, the veil of that face, and our minds could find no rest. That night neither of us slept well, and the next day we went again to seek Him. He had said a sentence that we repeated to our friends, 'Come and see one who is the Messiah who was to come; He is the Messiah, He said so Himself: *I am the Messiah*' And our friends came and they, too, were magnetized by that man. It was as if we said to each other, in the evening, when we gathered around the

[75] This refers to an Equipe contained in the book by L. Giussani, *In cammino (1993-1998) [On the Journey]*, in press with BUR.

fire with the four fish we had caught the night before: 'If one does not believe in a man like this, if I do not believe in a man like this, I shouldn't believe my eyes anymore.'"[76]

Fr. Giussani continued, "We are in the world to cry out to all mankind, 'Look, a strange presence is among us; among us, here, now, there is a strange presence. The Mystery who makes the stars, who makes the sea, who makes all things […] has become a man, was born of the womb of a woman […]'. We are in the world, because to us and not to others it has been made known that God has become a man. There is a man among us, one who came among us two thousand years ago and who has remained with us ('I will be with you all days, to the end of the world'), there is a man [among us] who is God. The happiness of humanity, the joy of humanity, the fulfilment of all the desires of humanity is He who brings this fulfilment to its conclusion; for those who follow Him, He brings it to its conclusion."[77] We today could add that the yearning for liberation that is confusedly and contradictorily expressed in the demands for new rights can only find fulfilment in Christ.

So, here we see how the second reason takes shape: "The contingent consequence of looking at Him, of watching Him speak, of listening to Him, of following Him, of saying to everyone, 'He is here, He is here among us, the God made man […]', the contingent consequence for those who say this, is that they live the problems of their humanity better–better; they do not resolve them, but they live them better. They love their spouse more, know how to love their children more, and to love themselves more; they love their friends more than the others, look at strangers with a generosity and tenderness of heart as if they were friends, and come to the aid of others as they can, as if their needs were their own needs. They look at time with hope and therefore walk with energy, use everything to be able to walk and enable others to walk too. In pain, they encourage, in joy, they are cautious, intensely cautious; they are intense in joy, but with the awareness that everything has a limit, a limit that is provisional. From limit to limit, women and men walk together toward their destiny, toward that day in which He will reappear not as He appeared to John and Andrew, the two who followed Him, but as He appeared at a certain moment in His life, on Mount Tabor, as He appeared risen from the dead."[78]

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[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid.*

So then, we are here for this presence. But who understands these things? Fr. Giussani wondered, "Parents, priests, Catholic associations: who understands the difference of this task well, who perceives this presence well, who does not seek to be worthy of finding a space for oneself in this world, the right to live in this world, only because one responds to the needs of others, who?"[79]

This is the testimony that Pope Francis offers us every day: who understands these things?

"A great purification, a great illumination must dwell in and dominate our soul, a great grace must happen to us… Must happen to us? It happened to us! Because what we have always said to each other in the Movement from the very beginning, albeit with other words, what others heard, and caused them to say, 'Well, I would like to stay with them,' what we all have sensed is this (we have to admit that it subverts everything): the center of life does not lie in succeeding, but in recognizing One. Not 'succeeding' but 'recognizing One'."[80] This was the surge of the heart. Right after, Fr. Giussani offered this alternative: "Is the value of a person a matter of being acknowledged–how good she is, how capable, how shrewd–or of being loved? It is so true that the one dignity of the person lies in being loved, that the substance and the nature of an 'I,' of your 'I,' is that of having been chosen by the Mystery: […] being loved is the substance, the nature of your 'I'."[81]

When this is lacking, all of us are lost. The center of life is "not a success, but the acknowledgment of a presence" (and perhaps some of us, like many of our contemporaries, seek fulfilment elsewhere because they did not feel loved, do not feel loved). "This is the Christian problem," he continued, "compared to the problem of any philosophy […]: utopia is not our salvation, […] but a Presence to acknowledge: not a 'to do' but a love."[82] We only need to realize what we are in order to understand whether with our 'doing' we can succeed in responding to our human drama. Life is this love, is the acknowledgment of being loved ("With age-old love He has loved us; He has kept his mercy toward us.")[83] And Fr. Giussani added, "When I say this word [love], when I say what I just now said–the problem of existence is not 'doing' but love–I see on 99% of the faces a confused extraneousness."[84]

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[79] *Ibid.*
[80] *Ibid.*
[81] *Ibid.*
[82] *Ibid.*
[83] Cf. *Jer.* 31:3.
[84] This refers to an Equipe contained in the book by L. Giussani, *In cammino (1993-1998) [On the Journey]*, in press with BUR.

What is this extraneousness? It is the sign that we do not understand, that we have already shifted. This extraneousness says, more than anything else, whence and from what we expect the answer. Rather, precisely because of this extraneousness, we shift from the essential to seek our substance in what we do. This extraneousness is the most powerful judgment we make about Christ and ourselves. Not understanding what our problem is, we do not truly realize who Christ is. Deep down the important thing, the essential, is elsewhere. It is the confused extraneousness that we feel before the mysterious design of God, the same extraneousness of Peter before the design of the Father, which Jesus obeyed and which, on the contrary, Peter did not understand. It is this extraneousness that moves us to shift from the essential, to seek our substance in something that, "in the secret thoughts of our hearts," we deem less "insubstantial" than Christ.

We will not be able to make our original contribution to the life of the world, if we do not find our substance in this love that enables us to be different in the social and cultural panorama. Fr. Giussani never stopped showing us where we can find our true substance: "The substance of my person is the presence of an Other."[85]

On the contrary, he reminded us, we seek our substance "in what we do or in what we have, which is the same. Thus, our life never has that sentiment, that experience of full certainty, that the word 'peace' indicates, […] that full certainty, that certainty and that fullness without which there is no peace and therefore there is no gaiety and no joy. At best, we reach the point of being pleased with what we do or with ourselves. These fragments of pleasure in what we do or in what we are give no gaiety and no joy, no sense of safe fullness, no certainty and no fullness […]. Certainty is something that happened in us, happened to us, entered in us […]. Someone happened to us, gave Himself to us, gave so much as to enter into our flesh and blood and soul: 'I live, not I, but [Christ] […] lives in me'."[86]

"A moment has come," said Fr. Giussani in 1991, "when the affection among us has a specific weight immediately greater than even dogmatic lucidity, the intensity of a theological thought, or the energy of leadership. The affection that we must have among ourselves has only one paragon [only one urgent need]: prayer, the affection for Christ. In fact, the moment has come in which the Movement walks exclusively in virtue

[85] L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)*, op. cit., p. 97.
[86] L. Giussani, *La familiarità con Cristo [Familiarity With Christ]*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi) 2008, pp. 25-26.

of the affection for Christ that each of us has, that each of us invokes the Spirit to have."[87]

Only a person who is certain will be able to respond to the challenges of the present: entering into the room of a terminally ill person where no one enters anymore, keeping a child with malformations, bringing children into the world, facing the lack of work without succumbing, etc.

Why does Giussani always return to John and Andrew, that is, to the first Christian announcement, the first encounter? Because he is out of touch? Because he is deluded? No, because he is convinced that "the solution of the problems life sets before us every day 'does not happen by directly facing the problems, but examining more deeply the nature of the subject who faces them.' In other words, 'the particular is resolved by examining more deeply the essential'."[88] Therefore, in order to face a problem, something must bring to the surface and fulfil the nature of our "I," that "eternal mystery of mortal being"[89] of which Leopardi wrote. The true question, then, is to ask who can reawaken the "I" from its reductions, freeing it from the dictatorship of its small desires to open it to the great desire for the fulfilment of life. "Only the divine saves the factors of the human'."[90] This is the core of the Christian claim. The task of Christ is none other than to reawaken the human person, to bring forth the full scope of man's desire, so as to liberate man from slavery to his own small desires.

To go to the essential, Jesus uses any opportunity, even a daily, simple fact–the Gospel is full of them–like sitting at a well to rest, being thirsty, and asking a woman to give Him some water to drink. This woman, since she is a Samaritan, is stuck in what she thinks: "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" She is stuck in the usual alignments, because Jews have no relations with Samaritans. Jesus could have sided with one group or the other. Instead, he brakes through the alignments, showing her a position that is not reactive, but original: He knows very well that behind the appearances, behind the formalism of the alignments, there is the thirsty heart of a woman, so He provokes her precisely at the level of her heart. "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you,

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[87] *Corresponsabilità*. Stralci dalla discussione con Luigi Giussani al Consiglio internazionale di Cl [*Co-responsibility.* Excerpts from the discussion with Luigi Giussani at the International Council of CL], *Litterae communionis-CL*, November 1991, p. 32.

[88] A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., p. 489.

[89] "On the Portrait of a Fair Lady…", vv. 1-2, in *The Poems of Leopardi: With Introduction and Notes and a Verse-Translation in the Metres of the Original* by Giacomo Leopardi and Geoffrey L. Bickersteth, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1923, p. 317.

[90] Cf. L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit., p. 83.

'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water." Jesus takes advantage of this opportunity to tell her who He is, and what claim He makes. What a gaze one needs, not to remain forever on the level of appearance, when faced with the provocations of reality and the alignments that confront each other! Now we are in the same circumstances, caught up in ideological conflicts, and we can allow ourselves to be harnessed to the ideology of one side or the other. The Samaritan woman pretends not to understand, as if she has not perceived the challenge. "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?". Jesus does not back down; on the contrary, He comes on more forcefully. "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; […] [it] will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." But who is the this man who claims to quench all the thirst of the desire of the human person, and who offers himself as the water that can fully satisfy? Who can make a similar claim? Only He, the Lord. So then, when He presses more forcefully, all the humanity of that woman emerges, because our humanity emerges only when faced with a real challenge, something truly unique, something that finally corresponds to what we are waiting for. The Samaritan woman surrenders. "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."[91]

This is the presence of Jesus, a presence that takes advantage of anything to reveal how different He is. We have been chosen, invited to become Jesus' friends so that in every situation, in every provocation of reality, we can testify to a different gaze, more human, more capable of grasping all the factors of human experience–ours and that of others. Only a love for Jesus, the fruit of long years of living with Him, can draw forth from us, in the face of any challenge, that difference that documents His presence at work.

If we do not understand this, our actions or reactions will uncritically take on the position of the other– as happened in the past, and we have seen described by Fr. Giussani. Thus we will delude ourselves, naively, that with ethics we can respond to the cultural and social challenges in which the conception of man is at stake. But is an ethical appeal sufficient to bring to term a pregnancy if the child will only live a few hours? Is being encouraged to have children enough to decide to have them? Each of us can verify it in our own experience. We would like to respond to the anthropological challenge with ethics: instead, the only response is the encounter

[91] *Jn.* 4:9-15.

(an encounter capable of re-awakening the "I"), from which ethics are also reborn. The only response is "the historic heft of the Christian Fact,"[92] a different presence in the world, the testimony of "something that is already free,"[93] that is expressed in an original way, not allowing the worldly dialectic of alignments to set the conditions of the game. Therefore, if we truly desire that something change for us and around us, we must "do Christianity,"[94] that is, "we have to *be a presence* […] to construct, right where we are, this piece of new humanity on a journey."[95]

The friend who was challenged by the man in the wheelchair looking for work, ends his story with this exchange: "Meeting him three years later, I asked him what had happened with the two friends who had accompanied him in those years. He told me, 'They opened a new prospect for the future.' And I said, 'Did they help you find a job?'. He said, bluntly, 'No.' And I, 'So then, what prospect did they give you?'. And he, 'A beginning, that is, a path, in the sense that they gave me a purpose.' And I wondered, 'Who are You, who allow all this to happen? Who are You, who, notwithstanding the apparent failure, reawaken an *I* to the point that he gains full awareness of who he is?' Out of the great number of those who found work, nobody every told me such a thing."

Without being continually generated by the gaze of Christ in the present, we will never be able to grasp the critical point of contemporary culture (in which very often we participate, as shown by the extraneousness of which Giussani spoke) which lies in the myopia with which the profound needs of the human person are considered. Not grasping the infinite import of the constitutive needs of the heart of every human person, our culture ends up proposing, both on the material and the existential and affective plane, an infinite multiplication of partial responses. But, as Cesare Pavese reminds us, "What a man seeks in pleasures is the infinite, and no one would ever renounce the hope of attaining this infinity."[96] Therefore, a multiplication, even to the nth degree, of "false infinites," (as Benedict XVI says)[97] can never satisfy a need of infinite nature. It is not the quantitative

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[92] L. Giussani, *The Long March to Maturity*, op. cit., p. 26.

[93] This refers to an Equipe contained in the book by L. Giussani, *In cammino (1993-1998) [On the Journey]*, in press with BUR.

[94] L. Giussani, *Un evento reale nella vita dell'uomo (1991-1992) [A Real Event in the Life of Man]*, BUR, Milan 2013, p. 326.

[95] L. Giussani, *From Utopia to Presence*, op. cit. p. VII.

[96] C. Pavese, *Il mestiere di vivere*, Einaudi, Turin 1973, p. 190.

[97] Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the XXXIII Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples*, August 10, 2012.

accumulation of goods and experiences, the unlimited possibility to transform subjective desires into rights, that can satisfy the "restless heart" of the human person. Nor, on the other hand, can an appeal to ethics redeem man from his own reductions, and restore to him an adequate awareness of himself. The only answer, as Giussani has shown us, is an event capable of reawakening the "I," of regenerating it. This is where School of Community acquires all its importance: "Jesus, in His life, demonstrates a passion for the individual, an urgent desire for his happiness. This leads us to consider the value of the human person as something incommensurable, irreducible. The problem of the world's existence is the happiness of each single person. 'For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?' (*Mt*. 16:26). No force of energy and no paternal or maternal loving tenderness has ever impacted the heart of man more than these words of Christ, impassioned as he is about the life of man. Moreover, to listen to these radical questions Jesus poses, represents the first obedience to our own natures. If we are deaf to them, we close ourselves off from the most significant of human experiences, for we would be unable not only to love ourselves, but also others. Indeed the ultimate motive pushing us to love ourselves and others is the mystery of the 'I'; any other reason is only an introduction to this one."[98]

We are not different from the others. If we are not reawakened, we, too, will end up succumbing to everyone's mentality. Poor wretches like them, we, too, will seek fulfilment in our career, in success, a clear sign of the reduction of our desire. What makes us different?

A friend writes me: "Dear Carrón, Ever since I heard your Saturday afternoon lesson at the Assembly of Responsibles of Latin America I haven't stopped shaking! At the start, when you began talking I wanted to get up and leave, wondering what I was doing there. What does it mean to recover the origins after centuries of history of the Church? We need to fight for Christian values! However, after this first impact, especially after the quote from Giussani, 'We went on for ten years, working on Christian values […] without knowing Christ,' I let down my guard a bit, which allowed me to relive and understand better an episode that happened to me shortly before marrying, and which I want to tell you about. Having decided that after the wedding my future wife would resign from her job and move abroad with me, we were very frightened at the idea of an initial pregnancy because we would not be able to support ourselves on my salary alone. Weeks before the wedding, my wife, given the situation, asked me if it was really a good idea

[98] L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit., p. 84.

to rely only on natural methods. Without thinking of the consequences of what I was about to say, I told her that the true problem was in the fact that, if we weren't willing to accept children, then deep down we weren't ready for marriage. I remember that, at the time, I was only thinking of the priest's question during the ceremony: 'Are you willing to welcome with love the children God will want to give you?'. Listening to you made me relive that moment and wonder what made me so free as to 'risk' what I most desired in the world. I realized right away that mere respect for a 'Christian value' was insufficient for putting at risk our imminent wedding, which I had desired for so long. What made me free in that circumstance was not the respect for a Christian value, but the desire to not separate myself from Christ; the desire to allow Christ to enter into the intimacy of our marriage, and the intuition that without Him it wasn't worthwhile to get married. Thinking over your lesson, I continue to wonder: who has ever spoken to me in this way? With such truth? Who makes me come alive like this? Who helps me to truly perceive the correspondence between Christ and my life? How much tenderness towards me! Thank you."

Like Pope Francis today, Fr. Giussani did nothing other than announce to us and witness to us the beauty of faith, to show us its reasonableness through the fruit it bears in life. Therefore the Pope insists that we must communicate to the world what is essential to us. Do you have anything more intelligent, more suitable to the real situation of the human person? Listen to what Pope Francis said he expects from the bishops. "Men who are guardians of doctrine not in order to measure how far away the world lives from the truth it contains, but in order to attract the world, to enchant it by the beauty of love, to seduce it with the offer of the freedom which is given by the Gospel. The Church does not need apologists for her causes nor crusaders for her battles but rather humble and confident sowers of the Truth who know that it is always given to them anew and who trust in its power."[99] Only the testimony and the recounting of what one lives, as Cardinal Scola told us,[100] can make Christianity fascinating, today as yesterday, and can make the "I" be born again and free the human person.

A friend writes, "During a discussion about the euthanasia law in Belgium, all of a sudden a colleague who I only knew by sight spoke up, saying that to his mind euthanasia of newborns with grave disabilities is right,

[99] Francis, Address to a Meeting of the Congregation of Bishops, February 27, 2014. 6.
[100] Cf. A. Scola, Words After the Homily on the Occasion of the IX Anniversary of the Death of Fr. Giussani and the XXXII of the Pontifical Recognition of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Milan, February 11, 2014.

in cases in which it is evident from birth that they will have no possibility of walking, or maybe even of speaking, and will never be able to do any activity autonomously; because, after all, he said, what kind of life would that be. They could certainly never be happy! [What is at play here is a desire of meaning for one's life.] Up to that point, I had only said banal things, without getting involved in a true judgment, but at that point I intervened in the discussion, recounting that I had a disabled daughter who was in the conditions he described, but that even so, first of all, she is happy, and this demonstrates that happiness is not proportional to how well one can 'perform' or be able to carry out certain gestures autonomously, because we do not give ourselves happiness. And then I told him that notwithstanding the toil, she has been, and still is a great gift for me, because her evident dependence in everything and for everything is a continual reminder of the fact that we are in the hands of an Other. Then I told him some things that happened in these years in which it was evident that her presence was truly a richness for those who met her. After I spoke of myself this way, nobody else had anything to answer back and a chill fell on the conversation. A week later my colleague returned to find me, telling me that he wanted to talk with me, and invited me to have a coffee. […] He said, 'I can't get out of my mind the question of how you could have told me about your daughter in that way and then, above all, how you could have had the courage to have other children after something of the kind, because for me this is inconceivable! […] This question keeps going through my mind and won't give me rest.' I was moved, and asked myself, 'What did this colleague see through me that won't let him rest?' Certainly not a beautiful discourse, but an exceptional Presence, [greater than me] that fascinated him. So for me as well it was an opportunity to see His Presence happen again! […] For me, staying in front of reality in this way was not something taken for granted. All the other times I happened to be in conversations of the kind, I always went away angry, without having had the courage to say anything, and only thinking with anger how it was possible for certain people to think in that way. This time for me it was possible to stay in front of the circumstance with all the truth of myself, because of the journey that I am making in following you and through the work of School of Community, because I am beginning to stay in front of reality without censuring anything, certain that what happens to me is first of all a good for me and the other is an opportunity Jesus gives me so that I can deepen my relationship with Him. The outcome is that I am happier!"[101]

[101] Cf. Lettera di Anna [Anna's Letter], in *Traces-Litterae communionis*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (April) 2014, pp. 4-5.

Here is what the essential is, and its historical relevance. "In a society like this, nothing new can be created, if not with a life: no structure, organization, or initiative will suffice. Only a different and new life can revolutionize structures, initiatives, relationships–in short, everything. And life is mine, irreducibly mine."[102] Therefore, only those who accept to take the journey, like Peter, will be able to give a real and culturally original contribution to the challenges of today. Liberation can only come from something that is already free, that is, from the Christian community not emptied of its historical relevance (culture, charity, and mission), of its capacity to generate and educate a reawakened "I." From the surge of the heart until today. Here lies all the cultural importance of those eyes, of that gaze that entered history and to which School of Community bears witness: "Jesus Christ came to call man back to true *religiosity* without which every claim to a solution of those problems is a lie," because Christian religiosity is the "*one and only condition for being human*."[103]

Now we can understand the importance of that simple, daily gesture of reciting the *Angelus*: letting the essential enter into our eyes, our heart, our thought, each time.

Angelus

[102] "Movimento, 'regola' di libertà" [Movement, 'Rule' of Freedom], edited by O. Grassi, in *CL-Litterae communionis*, n. 11, November 1978, p. 44.
[103] L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit., pp. 97, 86.

Saturday, April 5, afternoon

During the entrance and exit:
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Symphony n. 38, "Prager"
Karl Böhm–Wiener Philharmoniker
Deutsche Grammophon

■ **SECOND MEDITATION**
Julián Carrón

The Road of Maturity

Why did all the things we talked about this morning happen?

"The 'why,' in the final analysis, is the difficulty of […] Christian experience, in becoming mature. […] To varying degrees, for a long time this position stayed blocked within the confines of immaturity because of a lack within the evolution of our experience." Therefore, said Fr. Giussani, "Our true problem is to leave our immaturity behind."[104]

What did he mean by immaturity? Immaturity means weakness of self-awareness. The self-awareness does not grow, does not increase. What is the content of this self-awareness that does not grow? It is what happened to us with Christ. "Precisely this absence of self-awareness, of the awareness of what happened to me with Christ (that even if the whole world […] became something else, I wouldn't move, because this is me, a fact that defines my flesh, my bones, my spirit, my whole ontology […] the absence of this awareness […] also dug like a thorn in the flesh of those who remained faithful to our history, rigidifying their movements, their way of speaking, making the way they offered themselves schematic and mechanical, and thus generating nothing."[105]

Therefore, if what we live does not increase our self-awareness, that is, does not make us grow, we remain rigid and schematic. The weakness of awareness–Fr. Giussani said, referring to the phases mentioned–translates into "a mechanical faithfulness in forms. For this reason, a conformism, a slavery to frameworks, and a certain aridity carried on for a long time, especially on the educational level."[106] This formalism, (think, for example, of how we do School of Community, how we participate in certain

[104] L. Giussani, *The Long March to Maturity*, op. cit., pp. 28, 30, 32.
[105] *Ibid.,* p. 31.
[106] *Ibid.*

gestures) indicates that what we live does not become experience. But the reason Fr. Giussani began the Movement was precisely so that faith would become experience: if formalism prevails, the risk of losing the charism along the way is not at all behind us.

1. How can we overcome immaturity?

How can we overcome this immaturity? Everything we live must make our person, our awareness grow. Otherwise, we face the new challenges, which we are not spared, as if nothing had happened, that is, like everyone.

To understand what I mean, let's look together at the experience of the Apostles, who had our same difficulty. "They had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. He enjoined them, 'Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.' They concluded among themselves that it was because they had no bread." What a gap in understanding! "When He became aware of this He said to them, 'Why do you conclude that it is because you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or comprehend? Are your hearts hardened? *Do you have eyes and not see, ears and not hear?*'" What did they see that they did not remember, that left no trace? What did not remain in their eyes, in their hearts? "'And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many wicker baskets full of fragments you picked up?' […] 'Twelve.' 'When I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many full baskets of fragments did you pick up?' […] 'Seven.' He said to them, 'Do you still not understand?'"[107]

The disciples had seen two extraordinary, spectacular events, two multiplications of loaves, something never seen before in their lives, but since they did not realize the importance of what happened, and because they had not grown in their relationship with Him, they faced the new challenge–something banal, forgetting the bread–without having in their eyes what had happened. They were with Him, they had seen Him multiply the loaves, but not having grown in awareness of who Jesus was, even having in front of them the "bakery," they were worried about the fact that they had no bread. This is our problem too. What dominates in them is the worry about not having bread. For the disciples, Jesus' presence was equal to zero in the face of the new challenge, and they had Him there, physically present! He wasn't elsewhere, He had not "vanished" into the purely spiritual. For

[107] *Mk.* 8:14-21.

this reason, we have no right to complain about the fact that today He is not present the way He was present then. He was present! But His physical presence there was not enough. If we do not grow in awareness of who the One who is present is, even His physical presence will not suffice to give us a new, different way of facing the challenge. Without growing in awareness of who Jesus is, even if He is physically present, Jesus does not count for anything, and we act as we did before meeting Him.

"Jesus withdrew toward the sea with his disciples. A large number of people (followed) from Galilee and from Judea. Hearing what He was doing, a large number of people came to him also from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from beyond the Jordan, and from the neighborhood of Tyre and Sidon. He told His disciples to have a boat ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush Him. He had cured many and, as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch Him. And whenever unclean spirits saw Him they would fall down before Him and shout, 'You are the Son of God.' He warned them sternly not to make Him known."[108]

"On that day, as evening drew on," it says in another passage, after having healed many people, He said, "'Let us cross to the other side.' Leaving the crowd, they took Him with them in the boat just as He was. And other boats were with Him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Quiet! Be still!' The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then He asked them, 'Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?' They were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?'"[109] Since they had not understood who Jesus was, fear won in them. They had seen Him perform spectacular gestures, but nothing had changed, everything they had seen Him do had left no trace in them. Therefore, insecurity cast them into agitation. Their reaction was born of fear: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?".

If our awareness of who Jesus is does not grow, none of our attempts will dispel our fear. "Doing things" does not respond to our fears: what does respond is growing in the awareness of who Jesus is. It is a problem of faith. Faith, my friends, is what is in play here, but not faith as a formal affirmation that we all can make. This is not what makes the difference.

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[108] *Mk.* 3:7-12.
[109] *Mk.* 4:35-41.

What makes the difference is not the formal affirmation of the dogma, but the experience of what we say. This is seen in the way we stay in reality, because reality, the impact with reality, enables us to test the experience we have had, not the theology we have learned or how many times we have gone to School of Community. Experience rises to the surface in the face of the challenges, because we, like the Apostles, can see exceptional facts (how many we tell each other every time we gather!), which however do not increase our awareness of Him, the relationship with Him. Our self-awareness, the awareness of what happened to us with Christ, does not grow.

A person writes, "At work, I realize that my way of looking at reality is different from my boss's way. But all too often I do not go so far as to recognize that He is the one who enables this, and thank Him. So then even the experience I have does not cement the relationship with Him. And I realize this because then the next day, if a person snubs me or does not care for me, I feel deflated." So then you ask yourself, if this occurs after so many facts have happened, what is the use of faith? What is the use of being Christian? Living faith as a formalism, without a real experience, you have no reason for remaining.

Here we can truly grasp our problem, the immaturity of which Fr. Giussani spoke: we have had an encounter, we have followed it–as shown by the fact that we are here–we have seen exceptional facts, but all this fails to cement the relationship with Christ. What is the verification? That the "I" does not grow. Where do we see this? In the fact that we are in front of reality as if we had never seen anything, just like the disciples. This is an example of the formal, mechanical way we live even exceptional facts.

The same can happen with the activities we do: they do not generate personality, do not make our self-awareness mature. Why? "The activity remains detached from its origin. […] The copiousness and also the success of many initiatives of the community," Fr. Giussani says, "had given us a certain sense of self-importance." But since the activity remains detached from its origin, "the more you are absorbed in an activity, the more your activity dims the provocation of which instead it should be the instrument; it no longer provokes you. The more you are active, the less that activity provokes you. In fact, the more active you are, the more 'the blow is eliminated,' the impact, the challenge that the Christian fact in itself entails."[110]

The confirmation, continues Fr. Giussani, lies in the fact that "the activities do not generate personality, and so our mindset does not mature, and

[110] L. Giussani, *Ciò che abbiamo di più caro (1988-1989) [What We Hold Dearest]*, BUR, Milan 2011, pp. 142-143.

in the relationship with others everything is formal or verbal and it is not a proposal of oneself, of a new self, of a new 'I,'" that, "when […] it happens, one hears people say, 'But you're different from the others! How do you do it?', 'How can that fellow there be that way?'."[111] When there is not a new "I," the announcement remains verbal, a discourse. And what remains for us? "Nothing remains in our hands but burned earth […], there remains only the regret of a wasted day… ."[112]

We have seen exceptional things many times, participated in many gestures that we cannot help but acknowledge to be beautiful, done many activities, but they do not generate personality. And so our actions are the expression of fear, of existential insecurity, not of a new "I." Why? Because we do not live an experience: to the degree that what we see and do remains detached from its origin (not acknowledged in its origin), it does not become experience and therefore does not make our person grow, does not change our mindset, does not generate personality, does not help faith become personal. Doing and seeing are not enough: they must become "experience."

Truly, the human situation is more complex than the usual schematisms. For this reason, Fr. Giussani always told us, "Expect a journey, not a miracle that dodges your responsibilities, that spares you toil, that makes your freedom mechanical […]. This is a profound difference from before, from the journey made to this point: the profound difference is that […] you will not be able to follow us if you are not striving to comprehend. […] Now you will have to begin to really love […] life and its destiny."[113] Otherwise, even belonging to the most beautiful thing that has happened in our life will disappoint us. Pope Francis said the same thing of Saint Peter.

Why is it that facts do not increase the certainty of the "I"? Why is it that what we live, the initiatives in which we engage, do not cement the relationship with Him, and thus do not help answer the question of how one can live? Lack of experience brings to the surface a problem of method.

When something we live does not become experience, we do not grow; we reduce the experience to a mechanical fact, without it entailing a judgment on what we felt or lived. How can I tell when I am truly living an experience? Fr. Giussani said, "*Concretely, experience means to live what causes me to grow*. A person grows as a result of experience; that is, the valorization of an objective relationship. […] Therefore, 'experience' means the fact

[111] *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.
[112] C. Chieffo, "La guerra" *[War]*, *Canti*, op. cit., p. 235.
[113] A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., p. 636.

one realizes one is growing."[114] If the disciples do not realize who has been revealed before their eyes in the multiplication of the loaves, if they do not realize–it is not that they did not see it–what this implicates, then in the face of the new challenge they find themselves back at the beginning. Why is the realization that we are growing–this characteristic of experience–so crucial,? Because "a person is first of all consciousness, a being that is aware. It follows that experience is not the doing," says Giussani, "or the setting up of relationships with reality in a mechanical way. This is the mistake implied in the phrase 'to have an experience,' where 'experience' becomes synonymous with 'trying something out.' To have an experience means to *comprehend* the meaning of something. This is done by discovering its link to everything else; thus experience means also to discover the purpose of a given thing and its function in the world."[115]

For this reason, Fr. Giussani always had at heart the question of method. From the very beginning of his educational work, he said, "What we want–and this is our purpose here–is to free the young generation from mental slavery and from the tendency to conform, which mentally enslaves them to the forces in society." To help them, he entered the school saying to the students, "I'm not here so that you can take my ideas as your own [this is what we think now: "The important thing is that our kids 'retain' our ideas as theirs". This leaves us at peace, but doing so, nothing remains!], "I'm here to teach you a true method that you can use to judge the things I will tell you," that is, to judge all the things that happen to you in life. "From the very beginning, our educational efforts have always stood by this method, clearly pointing out the goal."[116] The goal of Fr. Giussani's entire educational effort, for which he left "the Paradise of Theology" for "the Purgatory of work in this life,"[117] was to "show how faith could be relevant to life's needs."[118] If we do not perceive the relevance of faith to life's needs, our faith will have an expiration date.

His goal was to show the relevance of faith to life's needs, so his students could see and touch with their hands that what he was proposing to them responded to the urgent needs of life, that it was a response to the question, "How can one live?". Fr. Giussani told us why he came to this conviction, "As a result of the education I received at home, my seminary training,

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[114] L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, The Crossroads Publishing Company, New York, 2001, p. 98.
[115] *Ibid.,* pp. 98-99.
[116] *Ibid.,* p. 11.
[117] A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., p. 146.
[118] L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education,* op. cit., p. 11.

and my reflections later in life, I came to believe deeply that only a faith arising from life experience and confirmed by it (and, therefore, relevant to life's needs)–that is, to the question, 'How can one live?'–, could be sufficiently strong to survive in a world where *everything* pointed in the opposite direction."[119] It was necessary to show this "relevance" and indicate a method for discovering it (that is, for judging). Therefore we used this line in our Easter poster because it is still to be learned as lived experience.

When we begin to realize the importance of the method, we start to be grateful to have a road ahead of us to travel, that there *is* a road; not that there will be no more mistakes, but more decisive than the mistakes is the fact that we have a road ahead of us to travel. Those who want can travel it: nothing else is needed but the desire to travel it, enough love for ourselves to desire to travel it, because we have been given everything we need to do it. As one of you writes: "It is different to go forward with the awareness that the road exists, because if this were not the case, at every difficult situation you would get paralyzed and convince yourself that life is a scam; end of story." But sometimes not even when we realize this do we avoid the thing that characterizes the human person today: doubt!

Now, how can we attain certainty? A human journey is needed!

2. The factors of a human journey

Having clearly identified the problem, let's see what the factors of this human journey are. Usually we make a mistake: we know these factors, but we think they are "only" factors of the beginning. We know that the heart is needed, that the encounter with an exceptional fact is needed, that living experience of the correspondence is needed, but we think that they hold only at the beginning: the heart is needed to recognize Christ, but once I've recognized Him the game is over. We think that they are not the factors of the journey, and thus often this work, this journey, is not done. This is verified when we see no increase in experience, in self-awareness.

For Fr. Giussani, these are not just factors of the beginning: they are factors of the journey, that is, they also mark all its steps. We saw this in chapter 8 of School of Community: there Fr. Giussani was not talking about what is necessary before encountering the Movement, about something that holds before the encounter. He was talking from within the journey that led the disciples to recognize Him, about what can facilitate this recogni-

[119] *Ibid.*

tion. The work of School of Community on chapter 8 of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* has shown us that this cannot be taken for granted. We have seen all the difficulty in responding to the question, "Who is Jesus?," of grasping the existential and cultural richness of the chapter, to respond to the challenges of our present times; consequently we easily reduce it to spiritualism. When I went to Brazil, I asked a young man who was talking about the situation of Venezuela: 'What does what you're saying have to do with the eighth chapter of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim?*". He looked at me, stunned, as if it had nothing to do with it. If School of Community is reduced to spiritualism, emptied of its historical and cultural heft, what remains? A text we can comment on. Then we go looking elsewhere for the cultural instruments for facing the challenges. So then, better to close the book right away and go elsewhere. If we reduce chapter eight to something spiritualistic, it is because we have not understood the import, the newness, and in this way we become part of the problem. We do not have an "I" sufficiently reawakened to grasp its newness.

So then, let's list again, briefly, the factors of a human journey.

a) The heart

The first factor is the heart, that is, the awareness of oneself, of one's desire for meaning, the realization of having within–or better, of "being"–the question: "How can one live?". The first instrument of a human journey is to become aware of ourselves, of our desire, of our need for meaning, of the need for an adequate purpose and of a road to reach it, of a certainty for facing circumstances, problems, contradictions. Life does not go on by itself, and without meaning everything gets lost, everything that happens serves for nothing; we can see very beautiful things, but they do not help us face life. Fr. Giussani always identified the heart as the true weapon we have, but only if this heart is not reduced to sentiment. This is the reason Fr. Giussani insisted on the heart, on our needs, on our human questions, as is documented in so many episodes of his life, as you can read in the biography written by Savorana.

"When I held the first meeting for priests," he recalls, "the first man who stood up asked me, 'What would you recommend for us young priests?' I told him, 'That you be men!' […]. 'What do you mean, that we be men?' 'That you be men! […] If you are men, you feel that which is precisely man's, the needs and problems typical of man; you live the relationship with all that becomes present and radiates from the present to you." And Giussani said the same to a group of *Memores Domini*, "Analogously, I'll answer you: be human, live the truth of your humanity. Your humanity

is not what you do now; it's how God made you, how He made you be born from the womb of your mother, when you were little […]. Be human, [which means] live your humanity as aspirations, as sensitivity to problems, and risks to face; live your humanity as faithfulness to what urges within your soul, that God makes urge within your soul from its very origin; and this way[…] [look at what an observation he makes: if you have this attitude, if you have this urge] reality will present itself to your eyes in a true way. For God to respond to me, to correspond, to satisfy, I need to be what He created me to be."[120]

So then, contrary to what we think, my humanity, your humanity, is not an obstacle, something inconvenient, but is the condition for understanding. To say this, where did Fr. Giussani look? What did he obey? He obeyed his nature, how God made him, created him and each of us. And how did He make us? God made us with "a complex of needs and 'evidences' which accompany us as we come face to face with all that exists. Nature thrusts man into a universal comparison with himself, with others, with things, and furnishes him with a complex of original needs and 'evidences' which are tools for that encounter. So original are these needs or these 'evidences' that everything man does or says depends on them."[121] It is amazing that God threw us into the fray with this instrument, because with the heart, comparing everything with the heart, we can avoid making mistakes. God throws us into the fray, in the comparison with everything, with this instrument: the heart.

Thus we can understand the crucial value of the premise of chapter eight of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim,* which we have worked on in School of Community. It is worth our while to re-read it. In order to grasp and judge the value of the person through his or her gestures, "religious genius" is needed. But this religious genius is not a particular gift; it is our humanity itself, the sentiment proper to the creature. What is the problem? That we often reduce our nature to our moods and that genius to mere spontaneity: "What we have called religious genius, that ultimate openness of the spirit, is something demanding a continual commitment from us, even if it takes its cue from each person's natural gifts. What a great responsibility education has: that capacity to understand […] is not spontaneous. On the contrary, the original gift of sensibility in us would be suffocated if it were treated as pure spontaneity [as usually happens in the common mentality];

[120] L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Can One (Truly?!) Live This Way?]*, BUR, Milan 1996, pp. 61-62.
[121] L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 7.

to reduce religiosity to this pure spontaneity is the most definitive and subtle way of persecuting it, of exalting the fluctuating, provisional aspects bound to circumstantial sentimentality. [So then, if we do not engage with effort], if this gift of sensibility for our humanity is not constantly solicited and given order, no fact, not even the most startling, will find correspondence within us [no fact will speak to us; exceptional things can happen, but are not useful for learning, for increasing the relationship with anything; it is all useless]. Sooner or later, we all experience that feeling of obtuse alienation from reality. This happens on one of those days when we let ourselves be led adrift by circumstances, when we have remained uncommitted to making an effort of any kind. On such a day, suddenly, things, words, and deeds, once such clear motivations, cease to be so, and, abruptly, we no longer understand them."[122] And you have the impression of always beginning from the start, as if all the things that happen served no purpose.

Therefore, the first step, the first factor of a human journey is to take my humanity seriously, to constantly engage with it, to accept participating in a place where I can be educated to be aware of it. Inviting us to do this constant comparison, Fr. Giussani does nothing other than follow Jesus, who in turn complied with what God did in giving us that set of original "evidences" and needs.

If we do not engage with our humanity, if we do not listen to the ultimate questions Jesus asks ("What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?"),[123] we are excluded from the most significant human experiences, as we noted this morning. Our humanity is reduced to the most mutable aspects, our feelings and moods. Unfortunately, our "I" is often reduced to this tangle of sentiments and mood changes. In this situation, then, you can end up saying: "I can no longer perceive my humanity as a resource for my journey; the heart is not an infallible criterion for judging." This means that a grave weakening of consciousness has occurred, a weakening of the perception of one's own desire and critical capacity–in fact, the exercise of judgment is made more fragile and uncertain by the reduction of desire, which is the criterion of judgment.

This reminds me of the precision with which Fr. Giussani described the difference between the young people he met in the 1950s and the generation of young people thirty years later, in the 1980s (just imagine how much has changed since then, how much this situation has worsened, also regarding

[122] L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit., pp. 82-83.
[123] *Mt.* 16:26.

the situation I found when I encountered the Movement thirty years ago): "The difference [lies] in a greater weakness of awareness one has now,"[124] that one perceives in today's young people.

What does this weakness of awareness consist of? There is no awareness of the fact that I have a criterion of judgment, therefore there is no awareness that I can judge and that this criterion is infallible; consequently, I need an external confirmation to be sure of something I am living. Fr. Giussani says this is a "weakness that is not ethical [it is not that today we are more incoherent than before, this would be nothing] but pertains to the energy of our awareness";[125] it is a weakness regarding the very dynamism of awareness. Thus we settle for any attempt at an answer, so reduced is the "I." Bewilderment is the fruit of this reduction of the "I."

Why has this happened to us, too? Because of "the pernicious and decisive influence of the power, of the common mentality." What is this influence of the power? We do not need to think of some secret strategy. The power is the multiform instrument through which the desire of man is reduced. "In fact, […] as an instrument, what does the power do? It tends to reduce desire [that is, our elementary needs]. The reduction of desires or censure of certain needs, the reduction of desires and of needs is the weapon of the power."[126] The power cannot eliminate what is in us structurally, as nature,that is, our original expectancy and our structural disproportion to it–but it can reduce it, strip it of its simplicity. It often does so with our complicity. Fr. Giussani described it with this image: "It is as if the young people of today were all hit […] by the radiation from Chernobyl: structurally, the organism is as before [no apparent change is seen], but dynamically it is no longer the same thing," as if the organism no longer had energy, due to the effect of the radiation. And then he said this line, which we should always keep in mind: "It is as if [tell me if this is not true] there were no longer any real evidence except trends, because trends are [an instrument] a project of the power."[127] If many times doubt and suspicion prevail in us, it is because there is no longer real evidence.

Imagine what it means to live without real evidence to cling to! It is the spread of confusion. It is not because we are not sufficiently good: be careful, because a temptation lies in wait here, that of reducing the observation of Giussani to the fact of not being good or coherent enough, or up to the

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[124] L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987 [The "I" Is Reborn in an Encounter])*, BUR, Milan 2010, p. 181.
[125] *Ibid.*
[126] *Ibid.*, pp. 181, 253-254.
[127] *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

challenge. No, the weakness Fr. Giussani talks about has nothing to do with ethical coherence; it has to do with awareness, that is, with the capacity to become aware of things: here it is a matter of evidence. In fact, he said that it is as if today there were no longer any real evidence. It is enough for each of us to look at ourselves in action, and we will find many examples of this.

So then, we can understand why the Christian announcement also "finds it much harder to become persuaded life, life and conviction."[128] For this reason, friends, either we summon up our patience, have the tranquillity and patience to make the journey–because it is as if we started out with this lack in the origin, were born in this situation–either we give ourselves all the time needed for what was announced to us to become conviction, or we will soon be disappointed. We are impatient, and we want everything to happen right away; we want to see the outcome of our effort immediately. But since things do not happen with the rapidity that we would wish, we feel disappointed by God's method and we look for some shortcuts to bring us to the goal faster. This is how utopia re-appears. Our naïvety always makes us dream of other roads, ones we think might be more efficacious.

In this situation, time is needed, while we are the "here and now" generation, used to plunking the coin in the machine and seeing the can of Coke roll down. For us it is more complicated to accept the time of the journey (previous generations were more accustomed to the fact that life was slower; communications were slower. Now, if the Internet connection takes two minutes longer, if we are not immediately connected, we get furious!). But we should not be dismayed by this.

Fr. Giussani said that the consequence of the weakness I described is that "what you hear or see is not truly assimilated. What surrounds us, the dominant mentality […], the power, causes [in us] an extraneousness from ourselves." It is as if our being was ripped away from ourselves: "On the one hand, we remain abstract in the relationship with ourselves, as emptied of affection [not just with others, but also with ourselves; think how long we are able to stay by ourselves and be silent: we have to flee, to distract ourselves. There is a sort of incapacity to stay with ourselves as if in our own home], as though drained in terms of affection […] and on the other hand, in contrast [pay attention!] we take refuge in the companionship as a protection."[129] We take refuge in "Pascoli's hearth"[130] to shelter ourselves from the cold.

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[128] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[129] *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.
[130] Cf. G. Pascoli, "Il focolare [The Hearth]", in *Poesie [Poems]*, Garzanti, Milan 1994.

Here we see again all the power and greatness of the grace that Fr. Giussani is for us. The first factor of a human journey, which he indicates for us–communicating to us his story, the experience of his humanity, of his being human–has to do with the possibility of intercepting the answer to the question of how one can live. The greatest emergency in educating concerns this lack of real evidence of which he spoke. As we see with young people, as you see with your children, it is useless to load them with certain content, if first of all we do not contribute to helping them become aware of this real evidence: any little breeze will sweep away all that we have planted!

How do we get out of this situation? There are precious few proposals in circulation! In the best of cases one is able to conduct an analysis of some symptoms of the problem, but when it is a matter of offering an opportunity for counterattack there is an unheard-of weakness in the proposal. The one resource in the field, as we see, for those who still do not want to surrender, is moralism: let's establish rules! But is that enough? We can see it in our own lives. Let's ask ourselves then, is there some hope for us, just as we are, with the weaknesses we have? Is there some hope for us at the point in which we find ourselves, not at the beginning, not before encountering Christ, not before encountering the Movement, but now, in the middle of fording the river? Is there hope for us?

b) A fact

Yes, there is hope. We see this documented before our eyes in Rose's women in Uganda, because certain facts say more than all our objections; they make them collapse. Suffering from AIDS, they had lost the will to live, and had no awareness of the value of their life, but in the encounter with Rose something happened that rescued them and gave them a new start on life. They recovered the will to take their medicine, because life had re-acquired meaning, and they want to live. The same happened for the man serving a life sentence. Though he has many years left, his life started anew because someone looked at him in a different way: "I had never felt looked at this way." Again, the wheelchair-bound man who could not find work, as we said this morning, started living again because the friends he encountered enabled him to discover a beginning, a purpose, a meaning.

So then, what do these facts that we hear recounted make evident? "What I am about to give is not an answer [that is only suited] to the current situation," says Giussani. "What I am saying is a rule, a universal law since humans have existed [and as long as they will exist]: the human person rediscovers herself in a living encounter, that is, in a presence she runs up against and that attracts her, in a presence" that brings with itself this affirmation:

"That which your heart is made of exists."[131] This is precisely what Mary Magdalene and Zacchaeus perceived from the beginning, and so they immediately became attached: "That of which your heart is made exists." Why do I know it exists? Because otherwise I would not have become attached. In fact, there are many things that happen, but very few that seize us.

This is the sign that the Christian event happens: that it revives and empowers that which has become obscured, the nucleus of the original "evidences" of the "I." The most powerful sign of the presence of Christ is this capacity to raise up again the original evidences of which our heart is constituted. This heart, which often slumbers, buried under mounds of debris, under a thousand distractions, is reawakened: you are provoked to acknowledge that it exists, the heart exists, your heart exists. You have a friend, you find a friend for your life when this happens to you, when you find in front of you someone who reawakens you to yourself. This is a friend, all the rest leaves no trace.

But this is also the law of the rediscovery of the evidence, of the true dimensions of the human, of "values." It is the road of awareness of your own elementary experience. For us, too, this "living encounter," this provocation, had to happen–and has to happen. And what is necessary for us is necessary for everyone. The "I" finds itself again, our heart is reawakened, in the encounter with a presence that brings with itself the affirmation "that which your heart is made of exists; look, for example, it exists in me."[132] This is the tested proof that your heart exists, otherwise, the friend would not have been able to reawaken it. For the "I" to be found again, no special strategy is needed, but simply the impact with a presence with the characteristics I've described.

Therefore, when Fr. Giussani was asked, "Your pedagogical proposal appeals to the religious sense of the human person, is this not so?", he answered, "The heart of our proposal is rather the announcement of an event that happened, that surprises people in the same way in which two thousand years ago the announcement of the angels in Bethlehem surprised some poor shepherds. An event that happens, before every consideration about the religious or non-religious person. It is the perception of this event that revives or empowers the elementary sense of dependence and the nucleus of original 'evidences' that we call 'the religious sense'."[133]

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[131] L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce*…, op. cit., p. 182.
[132] *Ibid.*
[133] L. Giussani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia [An Event of Life, That Is, A History]*, Edit-Il Sabato, Rome 1993, p. 38.

What blindness when we do not see that it is a gift to run up against a presence, even if I am still asleep, even if what I see in her has not yet happened to me, even if what she lives is not yet mine! The fact that a wide-awake heart happens in another, that I see it in her, is a grace and an opportunity for me: it means that it is possible! If it happened to Rose's women, it is possible for me. If it happened to the prisoner, it is possible for you. If it happened to the friend, to the last to arrive, it is possible for you. It is possible for you, it is possible! And no affirmation, no line of reasoning, no interpretation, no strategy of the power can keep someone from being there, in front of you, alive and present, with a wide-awake heart. Nobody can take this away. It is like the light, the tiny flame of a lighter: all the darkness surrounding it is incapable of eliminating its light. This is why the power gets angry, because no power, no darkness, can eliminate that light. This is the grace of Fr. Giussani for us. For us, Fr. Giussani was this light: we understood we had a heart because we saw that it existed in him.

Fr. Giussani continues, "Paradoxically, you find this originality of your life when you realize [pay attention!] that what you have within is something that all people have [the most shocking aspect is that this most personal thing is something I have in common with every person] and that truly enables you to speak with anyone, and not to feel extraneous to anyone."[134] People rediscover their own original identity when they run up against a presence that exerts an attraction, because there is "a correspondence to life according to the totality of its dimensions. People find themselves again when a presence grows in them […] that corresponds to the nature of life, and so they are no longer in solitude. […] Normally, instead, people within the common reality, as an "I," are in solitude–a solitude from which they seek to flee with their imagination [and discourses]. This presence [that corresponds to life] is the opposite of imagination, exactly the opposite."

The encounter that enables the "I" to rediscover itself is not "a cultural event, but a living one, that is, it is not a discourse delivered, but something living. This can manifest itself even listening to someone who is speaking, let's be clear; but when that person speaks, it is something living that you relate to […]. 'It is not a cultural encounter, but an existential one'."

That encounter has two characteristics that make it recognizable, that constitute its unmistakeable verification (Giussani provided us with all the signs so we can judge by ourselves; he did not want to take us for a

[134] L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, op. cit., p. 183.

ride): it introduces into life "a drama that implies […] the urgent need for something to change in your life, and, at the same time, [introduces] […] at least a drop of gladness–even in the most bitter condition, or in the realization of your meanness, gladness! In short, [to use another expression, for the 'I' to rediscover itself, what must happen is] […] 'an evangelical encounter,' an encounter that reconstitutes the vitality of one's humanity, like the encounter of Christ with Zacchaeus."[135]

After having met us, a friend said, "I had never thought what would have become of my life without a true turning point, without something, or better, someone who made my true self come forth. And yet it happened." What happened to her? "I ran up against someone who had a gaze upon me, an attention for me, that I had never experienced before."

What happened to our friend? Now we can describe it with precision. "An *encounter* with an objective fact which has an origin independent of the person having the experience. The existential reality of this fact or event is a community that can be documented, like every reality which is fully human. This community has an authority expressed through a human voice in judgments and directives, constituting criteria and meaning. All forms of Christian experience, even those lived in the innermost recesses of the soul, refer in some way to an encounter with the community and to its authority."[136]

What struck her? A gaze she had never encountered before, the same that struck the contemporaries of Jesus. The stories are familiar to us: Zacchaeus, Mary Magdalene, Matthew… all were called by name. But this is what appears in every page of the gospels.

This is where He shows who He is, because "only the divine can 'save' man," that is, can look at him without reducing him, can save the true and essential dimensions of the human person. Only the divine can cause us to become ourselves. Only the divine makes "my true self come forth." Thus Christ shows Himself for what He is. This is what Rose's women or the prisoner or the wheelchair-bound man recognized, because "a fundamental factor of Jesus' outlook is the existence in man of a reality superior to any other reality subject to time and space. The whole world is not as worthy as the most insignificant human person. Nothing in the entire universe can compare with a person, from the first instant of his conception until the last step of his decrepit old age."[137]

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[135] *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.
[136] L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education,* op. cit., p. 101.
[137] L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim,* op. cit., p. 84.

Therefore, "an encounter is what kindles the personality, the awareness of one's person ['my true self']. The encounter does not 'generate' the person [the person is generated by God when He gives us life through our father and mother], but it is in an encounter that I become aware of myself, that the word 'I' or the word 'person' is awakened. […] The 'I' awakens from its imprisonment in its original womb; it awakens from its tomb, from its sepulchre, from its closed situation of origin and as it were 'resurrects,' becomes aware of itself precisely in an encounter. The outcome of an encounter is the kindling of the sense of the person. It is as if the person were being born: he is not born in the encounter, but there he becomes aware of himself, so he is born as personality. The person is born as personality in an encounter, he is resurrected as personality in an encounter."[138]

How can I say that fact, that encounter, is true? How can I say it is the answer to "how can one live?", that it is the answer to the social challenges that we must face without succumbing anew to utopia?

c) Experience

The third factor is experience. The heart and the fact are not enough. Their "correlation," is needed, Benedict XVI would say.[139] I must realize the correspondence between the fact and the heart, that is, I must perceive that the fact corresponds to my exigencies, my needs. Where can I understand whether this fact responds to my needs? In experience. Here I grasp whether the encounter is useful for answering the question "How can one live?". In fact, the reality of that fact makes itself evident in experience, makes itself evident in experience for what it is, makes itself known for what it is.

"The most important thing I have said in my life," says Giussani, "is that God, the Mystery, revealed Himself, communicated Himself to people in such a way as to make Himself the object of their experience. The Mystery *also* becomes the object of our experience […] identifying Himself with a sign that is made of time and space."[140] For this reason, "unless Jesus, as God, enters our own experience, we cannot recognize Him properly, with that solidity, though with difficulty, with that suggestiveness, though enigmatic, with which reality presents itself to our eyes."[141]

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[138] L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, op. cit., pp. 206-207.

[139] Benedict XVI, *Speech to the Bundestag of Berlin*, September 22, 2011.

[140] L. Giussani, *L'autocoscienza del cosmo [The Self-Awareness of the Cosmos]*, BUR, Milan 2000, pp. 164-165.

[141] L. Giussani, *To Live Reason*, in *Traces-Litterae communionis,* Vol. 8, No. 1*,* (January) 2006, p. 4.

Experience, as we have seen, is not merely when the "I" runs up against a fact, like a mechanical impact, because this does not make us grow, does not leave a trace. It implies the comparison between the fact and the heart, in which a judgment emerges, and it implies that I become aware of the presence of another factor that makes possible the reality that surprises me. Experience happens when we live facts and judge them by that complex of original evidences and needs found within, and called "the heart." Why is it that even though we see many exceptional facts, they do not serve to make our relationship with Him grow? Because of this lack of judgment. It is as if we learned nothing from what we see, from what we live.

Therefore, in the human journey this factor called "experience" is necessary. Without judgment there is no experience (even though we often use the word "experience" for mere "trying" things). This is not a secondary consideration. That which does not become experience leaves no trace other than a sentimental repercussion. The consequence is that in the face of every new challenge we are always at the same point, helpless as we were the first time. So then, at a certain point, one says, why am I here wasting time, if what I live is not useful for my life? People end up disappointed.

Without experience, our "I" does not increase, our person does not grow. "Experience must be just that, experience. It must be judged by our intelligence." Only in this way will it leave a trace and be "preserved by memory."[142]

"Last week I was at dinner with a friend whose family has belonged to the Movement for years. Just after we began, the father recounted how an old lady had to remain standing on a trolley car, while a young man who had seen her would not give her his seat. Commenting on this little episode, he said, 'What society is missing today are values.' The discussion went on and at a certain point I asked, 'But where do you think values come from?'. 'This is a good question,' he answered. In an instant I looked at the fact that in my experience it is evident that the desire and capacity to embrace the world are born of and remain in the mysterious but real encounter with Christ, who revives me and expands the measure of my heart, making a total stranger on the tram worthy of attention and compassion. Continuing together along this line, both parents realized that values are born of an encounter that comes first, which is the source of the values. In an instant, I realized they had understood. They had an experience of it, but it was a foggy experience! It had to be brought back to the surface. They did not simply try to stick on a label, you could understand that by

[142] L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 84.

the lively mood at the table. It was true, sincere, vivacious. The mother recounted how she encountered the Movement as a girl and concluded saying, 'Truly, a human encounter that reawakens the heart is needed!'. At the end of the discussion we realized that the first responsibility we have in order to change society is that we, first, experience this encounter that reawakens man's humanity (I felt inside the explosion of a desire to be ever more filled with Him) in the hope that then through us it will also spread to the other 'trolley car passengers.' It is mysterious, because it involves a measure and a time that are not mine, but it is evidently the only reasonable hypothesis."

In this regard, during a CLU Equipe, Fr. Giussani recounted an episode that happened to him shortly after being ordained (you can also read it in his biography): "I discovered this as I began to hear confessions as a young priest. I said to myself, 'Look at these people who come to tell me all these shocking things; they come to me, just twenty-three years old. Why don't they go to those who have heard everything under the sun, sixty-year-olds or seventy-year-olds? Because those priests do not have experience, while with the material they give me I use an ideal instrument, that is, I judge' [I make a comparison between what they tell me and my original needs. People returned because they had found someone who helped them to make a journey. The other priests made comments, expressed impressions, but did not help them. People sought out Giussani, a twenty-three-year-old priest, while those of sixty or seventy, since they had not made this comparison, had nothing to say]. So then, to experience means 'to try things, judging.' This is the fundamental point, because the ideal makes you understand also what another person is living, not necessarily that you live it, but that you identify with the other from the point of view of the ideal: it enables you to judge and thus gives you the capacity to change. This is experience. [And he added something crucial for us–pay attention!] Either our companionship becomes an experience [a place where we are constantly invited to have an experience, where we truly have an experience] or it truly becomes dangerous [yes, dangerous!], because those who belong behave like sheep in a flock."[143] This is the fundamental point. Either our companionship becomes experience or it becomes truly dangerous, because those who are in it behave as sheep in a flock. Instead, when one begins to judge, everything becomes part of the road.

[143] L. Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose [Certain of a Few Great Things] (1979-1981)*, BUR, Milan 2007, pp. 248-249.

How can we see that we have found the answer to the question "How can one live"? Let's discover it in action, in another testimony: "For eighteen years my life has lacked substance: I had no awareness of who I was. I wasted the time I was given! Last year with the beginning of my university experience I met the CLU. I was blown away by how kids just like me really savored their studies, food, singing, spending time together. These were all absolutely normal activities but steeped in something else that fascinated me. Some in particular overwhelmed me with the way they faced the circumstances of their lives and with the way they looked at me, notwithstanding my limitations. I followed them because I wanted to live like them and so I trusted those who I had in front of me, beginning to feel affection for them, but inevitably I felt flooded with great sadness. I sensed something was missing. I was sad because I hadn't succeeded in getting into the department I wanted. Then I finally did, but nothing was enough for me, not even this. I believe I have grown, because I'm beginning to ask myself questions and to reflect: can I be so fragile as to be unable to face circumstances and changes? Why do I constantly feel something is lacking? Who can fulfill me? Every day I discover a great need for Him. It wasn't getting into the department I wanted, that which I longed for! He asks me to say *yes* to Him, not to the people who have been His witnesses for me. I don't want to deceive myself and waste another second of my life, because I desire to become certain that the pivotal point of my life is Christ."

Where did this girl recognize she had encountered the answer to the question of how one can live? "For eighteen years my life has lacked substance: I had no awareness of who I was. I wasted the time I was given!" And what happened at a certain point? She encountered, ran up against a fact: "absolutely normal activities but steeped in something else that fascinated me." Why was she fascinated? Because it corresponded to what she was waiting for, to what she desired. For this reason, "*the awareness of the correspondence* between the meaning of the Fact that we encounter and the meaning of our own existence"[144] is the decisive question. Thus you can realize you have found the answer to the question "How can one live?" because the encounter corresponds to the needs of your heart, so much so that it kindles awareness of yourself: "I believe I have grown, because I'm beginning to ask myself questions and to reflect."

Then, our friend is disconcerted because she has a persistent sense that something is missing. But this sense is precisely what demonstrates what

[144] L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education,* op. cit., p. 102.

has happened in her: the encounter awakened all her human need. It is exactly the sign that this encounter responds to our expectation: it makes us break free of the reduction, of the sepulchre. How did this happen? Through absolutely normal actions. What are these "absolutely normal activities but steeped in something else that fascinated me?". We saw it in School of Community, and it is beautiful: the "revelation of the divinity made manifest in the living existence of Jesus, not with impetuous displays or spectacular gestures, but with the continuous, silent transcending of the limits of human possibility. [What seemed only] […] natural goodness […] reveals itself simply as a miracle […] a silent passage transcending the limits of human possibilities but much more portentous than the immobility of the sun or the trembling of the earth."[145]

Thus we can adequately perceive the meaning of that encounter: "The value of the fact which we encounter transcends our power to understand so much so that an act of God is required for an adequate understanding. The same gesture by which God makes His presence known to humanity in the Christian event also enhances a person's potential for knowledge, raising him up to the exceptional reality to which God attracts him. We call this the *grace of faith.*"[146] Thus I understand its importance for life.

How does the certainty grow?

d) Verification

The final factor of this human journey is verification. Everything that happens to us, the circumstances we have to face, the gestures we propose are the opportunity to know (recognize) better what responds to the question of our life, and thus to "verify it." This is our supreme interest, in fact: the growth of the "I," the generation of a subject who has substance, who is free and creative. But what is the problem? "Why is it," Fr. Giussani asks himself, "that for many CL becomes a disappointment? Because once they enter, it is as if they closed [the game], as if they had arrived." Instead, the encounter marks "the beginning of the adventure. The adventure begins when the person is awakened by the encounter."[147] The whole adventure begins here; the beautiful part begins in that moment. It was this way for Fr. Giussani. " 'I was a young seminarian, an obedient, exemplary boy, until one day something happened that changed my life radically.' It was when his professor [Fr. Gaetano

[145] R. Guardini in L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit., pp. 61-62.
[146] L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education,* op. cit., pp. 101-102.
[147] L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, op. cit., p. 207.

Corti] read John's Gospel. 'My life was literally bowled over by this: both as memory that kept on striking my thoughts, and by the stimulus to re-evaluate the day-to-day banalities. From that moment the instant was no longer a banality for me. All that was–therefore all that was beautiful, true, attractive, fascinating, even just as a possibility–found in that message its raison d'être, as the certainty of presence in which there was hope to embrace everything. What made me different from those who surrounded me was the will and the desire to understand. This is the soil from which our devotion to reason springs.' This discovery never abandoned Fr. Giussani: 'The greatness of the Christian faith, without equal with any other position, is this: Christ answered the human question. Therefore, those who accept faith and live it, and those, not having faith, drown in the question, despair in the question, suffer in the question, have a common destiny'."[148]

For this reason, "reality should not be archived [because by now we have encountered Him. Because of the fact of having encountered Him] […] we have everything, but we do understand what this everything is [what the value of what we have encountered is] […] in the encounter with circumstances, people, events. Nothing should be archived […] or censured, forgotten, denied, nothing. [Because] […] we understand what this 'everything' means in judgment, in facing things."[149] This is the way it happened with you: you did not discover what your mother meant by meditating on her maternity, but by facing your fear, hunger, needs, and solitude in the relationship with her. This is how you understood what your mother was for you. Without this constant verification of what your mother meant for your life, you would not be so powerfully attached to her, you would not have understood what her presence meant for you. Therefore, if once the encounter with Christ happens we stop–instead of constantly verifying it by facing any challenge or urgent need in life in reference to this encounter–we cannot understand well what happened to us, what grace we have received.

To whom will He reveal Himself? Who will discover its value? Only those who risk themselves in the fray and verify in the face of any challenge who the One we have encountered is. We can understand that Christ answers the question "How can one live?" only in making this journey: the more we travel, the more we are certain of what we live, and everything cements the relationship with Him, increases the awareness of having

[148] A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., p. 47.
[149] L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, op. cit., p. 55.

found that with which I can look at any thing, enter into any circumstance, into any darkness.

3. The method: following

Having seen all the factors, the steps of this journey, I'll speak briefly about the last point.

By what method does all this become increasingly ours? By following. By following what we have encountered, we can constantly verify how it responds to the needs of living. Following is the journey that Peter made: committing himself to sharing Jesus' life, slowly, limping, erring, he saw how his person grew.

"Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus, going up a little slope before that house. Simon was there with his eyes fixed on that individual who was waiting for him a bit further on, full of that curiosity that characterized people the less 'educated' and the richer in vitality they are. When he found himself there, three or four yards off, he would never forget the way He stared at him! […] 'Nobody ever looked at me this way!'. He was overwhelmed by a phenomenon that the dictionary calls *amazement.* So much so that he immediately felt bound [attached to that man] […]. If a popular revolt had arisen against that man, Simon would have been there for him, even if they had killed him (you, too, would be this way: you would not be able to leave Him!). […] The next day, instead of going to do his duty, that is, catch fish, he ran to the nearby village, because he had heard that [He was there.] […] In fact, there were about thirty people there, and Simon squeezed into their midst to hear Him speak [to watch Him speak]: […] it was like the day before, when He had told him: 'Simon, son of John, you will be called Peter,' revealing all his deep and constitutive nature. […] A bit later, that man, who by then had become a friend […], invited them to a wedding, and changed water into wine. […] How could he not feel bound hands and feet to that man? [Who was He?] Who was like that man?".[150] And every day he returned home different. There is no need of confirmation. There is no need of confirmation when by now everything confirms, when there is an evidence that confirms everything. The confirmation is in the experience itself: he returned home changed, different. And this amazement is re-lived the next day and the next week. From day to day, there was more evidence of

[150] L. Giussani, "Il 'sì' di Pietro" [The 'Yes' of Peter], in *L'attrattiva Gesù* [*The Attraction That Is Jesus*], op. cit., pp. VII-VIII.

a fondness, an adherence, a trust, a certainty, so much so that when that evening at the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus said that thing that was incomprehensible for man: "I will give you my flesh to eat," and everyone said He was crazy, and right after He turned to them saying, "Do you want to leave too?", Saint Peter gave that impetuous answer, 'Even if we don't understand what You say, if we leave You, where will we go? There is nobody like You, You alone have the words that explain life, that give meaning to life."[151]

Simon's *yes* on the Lake of Galilee is the continuation of this attachment, this wonder, this admiration that lasted two, three years; and then Simon did not always get the right answer. When Jesus said for the first time that the Son of Man would have to suffer much, be reproved by the elders, the high priests, the scribes, and then killed, Saint Peter had not yet made a big mistake, and so he felt sure, calm about his sentiment, and said that he would rather suffer beheading. But Jesus answered, "'Get behind me, Satan! You do not want Me to do what my Father wants, but what you deem right.' What humiliation! But the [paradoxical] outcome was that Simon was even more attached"[152] to Him. His relationship with Jesus was "full of esteem […], [born] as judgment, as gesture of intelligence that dragged with it the heart, […] made […] of a tenderness, so much so that he and the others would have let their skulls get cracked rather than betray Him (and betray Him they did! They would have let their skulls get cracked rather than betray Him, but they did betray Him, even that!)."[153] "In that moment the cock crowed for the third time. Jesus left the room, dragged by the soldiers […], looking over toward Peter. Simon Peter, who was there in a corner waiting, hearing the noise, saw Him. And 'he wept bitterly'." Peter "turned toward Christ with his heart crushed by the consciousness of his own paltriness and cowardice: […] a coward, we could say a 'sinner'." And "Peter, at Pilate's court, was a man crushed by […] the awareness of being a sinner, crushed by his mistake, which was precisely the opposite of what he would ever have wanted, the opposite of the feelings he had always had for Jesus. What happened to me? Why in the world did I do that? Who am I? What is man?"[154]

And so, "that time, when the boat came to shore full of fish [and Jesus was there], and […] He had prepared a little fire with some cooked

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[151] Cf. *Jn.* 6:53-69.

[152] L. Giussani, "Il 'sì' di Pietro" [The 'Yes' of Peter], in *L'attrattiva Gesù* [*The Attraction That Is Jesus*], op. cit., p. IX.

[153] *Ibid.*, p. XI.

[154] L. Giussani, "La virtù dell'amicizia o: dell'amicizia di Cristo" [The Virtue of Friendship: or, of Friendship with Christ] , *Tracce-Litterae communionis*, April 1996, p. III.

fish on it, and all the apostles settled down to eat […] and [Jesus] also began to eat with them, and Simon was there by Him […] and He asked him that question ('Simon, do you love Me?'), that *yes* was not the outcome of an act of willpower, was not the outcome of a 'decision' of the young man Simon: it was the emergence, the coming to the surface of great tenderness and adherence explained by the esteem Simon had for Him–therefore it is an act of reason–because of which he could not help but say *yes*. And the whole heap of his sins committed, the whole heap of the potential sins he would commit, were irrelevant: he did not even think two seconds [about his sins], they did not even cross his mind,"[155] so did His presence prevail. "'Simon, do you love Me?' and he said, 'Yes.'" "The 'yes' came out as consequence of the amazement with which he looked at Him, with which he regarded Him every morning, and looked at Him in the evening as he left,"[156] when he fell asleep every evening. In this way Jesus entered into history so that each of us could live Peter's experience, limping, betraying like Peter, erring, but ever more attached, seeing that tenderness grow, that adherence, esteem, to the point of saying, "I don't know how, Christ, I don't know, but all my human fondness is for you."[157]

Christ entered into history, is present, allows us to encounter Him today, happens now, to reawaken all of our "I," all of our heart, all of our capacity for adherence, esteem, human sympathy for Him, so that we can live life full of His presence, and the joy of His presence may begin to invade our life. Our reason and freedom now are in front of this presence, like Peter two thousand years ago.

"It was not a sentimental attachment, not a phenomenon of emotion: it was a phenomenon of reason, exactly a manifestation of that reason that attaches you to the person you have in front of you, inasmuch as it is a judgment of esteem. Looking at the person in front of you, a marvel of esteem is born that attaches you to the person."[158] It is an esteem that flows from shared living with Him.

Only from this love can mission be born. "For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all

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[155] L. Giussani, "Il 'sì' di Pietro" [The 'yes' of Peter], in *L'attrattiva Gesù*, [*The Attraction That Is Jesus*] op. cit., pp. IX-X.

[156] L. Giussani, "La virtù dell'amicizia o: dell'amicizia di Cristo, [The Virtue of Friendship: or, of Friendship with Christ]" op. cit., p. VII.

[157] Cf. *Jn.* 21:17.

[158] L. Giussani, "Il 'sì' di Pietro" [The 'yes' of Peter], in *L'attrattiva Gesù*, [*The Attraction That Is Jesus*], op. cit., p. IX.

have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised."[159] Mission cannot happen without all that we have just said. To reach it, it is necessary to begin from the start. If nothing happens in me, I cannot then disguise myself as an activist. Rather, I must return to the origin, asking myself: how am I living? In fact, if I am not transformed from within, if I live just like everyone–because the memory of Christ is not immanent in my person, because it does not bring about a difference in me–if everything is pure force of will, I can do many initiatives, but none of them communicates a difference. So then, we should have only one concern: to live the memory of Christ, as we said, because only if Christ changes me, only if I accept letting Him change me, only if He draws me, only if He seizes me, only if He conquers my person, will I be able to bring something to others. In fact, we bring nothing else but our experience.

"Our task is not to ask ourselves what we have done to change the structures of the world, but at what point our conversion is," Fr. Giussani said in 1968. "And responding to an objection, according to which the Christian community 'cannot be an inherently new society if it is conditioned by certain structures which, for better or worse, prevent it from being a new society,' he replied: 'Christian life is a method for changing structures, too,' but 'it is an illusion to expect to change the structures unless something gratuitous happens in us,' that is, a 'conversion'."[160]

Therefore, the heart of mission is the love of Christ that burns and melts our heart. The heart of mission is the heart itself of our life; this is what must shine forth in all we do, in everything we touch, in everything with which we enter into contact. Therefore the condition of mission is the change of my person.

How do we see this change? In our discourses? No. In our initiatives? Lots of people organize initiatives. So then, what is the unmistakeable sign that helps everyone see that we are missionaries? How worked up we get? No. The sign is gladness! "Therefore the great rule of mission is that we communicate only through the gladness of our heart, the change that happened in us [what a grace to have someone who tells us these things, so that we cannot cheat. Therefore, if what we bring is complaining, you can organize all the initiatives you want, but there is no mission: who cares for one who constantly complains?]. The word 'gladness' indicates the face, the fascinating and persuasive aspect of the conversion that the

[159] Cf. *2 Cor. 5:14-15.*

[160] A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., p. 398.

power of God has worked in us. […] As always for the human person, its persuasive, convincing power lies in the fascination it exerts. The fascination of conversion is the glad face it produces: not discourses, but the glad face that it produces. This sentence is fantastic: *Notam faciet gloriam nomini Sui in laetitia cordis vestri*: He will make known the glory of His name (that is, of His dominion, of His power) through the gladness of your heart."[161] This is what finally overcomes the dualism, and this means being lay people, that is, new creatures. All the rest is not so, nothing of the rest, because everyone already has all the rest. Lay, that is, new.

Fr. Giussani insisted, "The Church does not exist to bring order to history in a worldly way, but to bear witness that it has already been given order. […] With what system does the Church bear witness to this? Because it is a human reality that is made differently from the others. The Church bears witness through the modality of its shared living, through the modality of its gestures, because it is something different from the others. […] It is a strange piece of humanity; strange, different. The Church is witness not because it erected and maintains Saint Peter's basilica, the Church is witness not because […] it creates a great network of schools, not because it broadcasts television throughout the world and asks CL to manage it, the Church is not [witness] because it has 154 daily newspapers around the world.; It is not because of an activity, but because of her state [but we thought for years that having more space, more power, made us different: we actually believed it, like everyone!]. The word state also implies the expression of activities, but it implies the activities as expression of something; the word state indicates this. People are struck by our state of life, not by our activities," that is, by what shines forth, by what overflows, by that victory of being over the nothingness that looms as a temptation in our culture. This nothingness is vanquished only by a Presence that binds us, that binds us so strongly that it keeps us from plunging into nothingness: "For people, our testimony is given by our state, that is, by our real and conscious position in the face of everything. For this reason, the apex of testimony is virginity, as such."[162]

Listen to what Fr. Giussani wrote in 1965, from San Antonio, Texas, where he went alone: "I measure thoughts and actions, moods and reac-

[161] HISTORICAL ARCHIVE OF THE ECCLESIAL ASSOCIATION MEMORES DOMINI (ASAEMD), *Audiovisual documentation,* Summer Spiritual Exercises of the *Memores Domini*, Le Pianazze (PC), July 29-August 3, 1973, second lesson of August 2.

[162] ASAEMD, *Audiovisual documentation*, Summer Spiritual Exercises of the *Memores Domini*, Falcade (BL), July 31-August 5, 1983, second lesson of August 4.

tions, days and nights. But Another Presence is the profound companion and complete Witness. This is the long journey that we must make together, this is the real adventure: the discovery of that Presence in our flesh and bones, the immersion of our being in that Presence–that is, Sanctity, which is the true social undertaking, too. For this reason […] it is necessary to follow with courage and faithfulness those symptoms given by the complex of conditions in which we have come to find ourselves: we need nothing more."[163] It is a love, a love of this Presence and a gratitude because it exists.

[163] A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., pp. 366-367.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: Jer 11:18-20; Psalm 7; Jn 7:40-53

HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL PIETRO PAROLIN
VATICAN SECRETARY OF STATE

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am glad to celebrate the Eucharist together with you during the 2014 Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. I greet you with fraternal affection and with that joy that "fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus."[164]

May these days be a time of intimacy with the Lord−a longer and more intense period of staying face to face with Jesus Christ, who is the "essential," deepening the relationship of communion with Him−and the opportunity to focus on our Christian identity, never as before so tried by the wearing interaction with the insidious spirit of worldliness, capable of insinuating into and contaminating every environment and reality, sparing none.

I ask for you the abundance of the Holy Spirit, who is the protagonist *par excellence* of experience, and of all of Christian life. I entrust you to the intercession of Mary, mother of God and our mother, and of all the saints.

And I bring you a special benediction of Holy Father Francis, which is for the entire Fraternity, so that–as Fr. Julián Carrón, President of your Fraternity, wrote him, and to whom I extend a very special greeting–"the Holy Spirit may open us to change of heart and commitment to give our life for the work of Christ in all the environments and places in which we live."

"Press on to make Him my own" is the title of these Spiritual Exercises. I imagine that it is inspired by verse 12 of chapter 3 of Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians: "It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ (Jesus)."

Once again we find ourselves here in front of divine initiative. It is like a game: Paul was escaping from Jesus and was persecuting Him. But Jesus reached him, touched him, seized him and now Paul is the one to run after Jesus to possess Him. God always arrives first. He created us. He redeemed us. He speaks to us in His Son. He renews us with His grace.

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[164] Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1.

This is expressed in the opening prayer of today's liturgy: "Omnipotent and merciful Lord, draw our hearts to You." "Draw our hearts to You" we said "because without You we cannot please You, the highest good." In this prayer, in this brief invocation, we hear the unmistakeable dynamic of the Christian existence.

At the beginning of the life of faith there is not an intention, an act of will, a calculation, a correct line of reasoning. Faith is not the following of truths built or reached by us, with our strength. In the beginning, there is always a motion of attraction, something that attracts our hearts. "Draw our hearts to You, Lord."

And this word also describes the dynamic of the life of the Church. Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI said it forcefully: "The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by '*attraction*': just as Christ 'draws all to himself' by the power of His love."[165] The current successor of Peter, Pope Francis, repeats it continually. I'll quote only a few lines of his October 1, 2013 homily in Saint Martha's, where, drawing on the line of his predecessor I just quoted, the Pope said, "When people, when peoples see this witness of humility, meekness and docility, they feel the need" which "the prophet Zecharaiah spoke of, saying: 'Let us go with you'. Faced with the witness of charity, people feel this need. It is this public charity without domineering, not self-important, humble, that adores and serves!" "This is the witness," continued the Pope, "that makes the Church grow." In fact, "St. Therese of the Child Jesus, has been named Patroness of the missions, because her example makes people say: we want to come with you."

For Fr. Giussani, whose children in the faith you consider yourselves, if today the Lord can attract the hearts of His own, this means that He is alive and works now, here and now. This is "the attraction of Jesus,"[166] that he must have told you about many times, with his evocative words, when he narrated the episodes of the Gospel. One can be attached with noble sentiments of devotion to right ideas, or to beautiful memories of beloved people who have left us, but this is an attachment, not an attraction. One can be humanly attracted, can live the experience of attraction only for a person who is alive, who moves, who breathes. We are not the ones to put Him in the first place with our own efforts, with our auto-suggestion. He is the One who works!

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[165] Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Holy Mass for the Inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean,* Square in front of the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, May 13, 2007.

[166] L. Giussani, *L'attrattiva Gesù [The Attraction That Is Jesus]*, op. cit.

If the Lord draws our hearts to Himself, this means that He is alive. And if He attracts our hearts, it also means that He loves us. He wants to give us salvation. He is so alive and loves us so much that with time, as we slowly grow and become adults and then begin to age, we can realize, can recognize with simplicity that the attraction is actually an embrace, being picked up and held in His arms. Slowly, as we grow and age, this can become evident for us, as it became evident for the first Apostles: the point is not me who runs toward Jesus, but He who runs to meet me, who looks at me, who takes me in his arms, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son. When you are about to fall, He is the one who can sustain you. When you fall, He is the only one who can lift you up again. In this way each of us becomes ever more existentially certain of what Saint Paul said, "So it depends not upon a person's will or exertion, but upon God, who shows mercy."[167] Thus the Lord can give us the grace to return to being like children and to go to Paradise, because the one condition he set for going to Paradise was to return to being like children. "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."[168]

There are signs that tell us that we are being carried in His arms and are proceeding on the right road. One of these signs is humility. When the encounter is real, we are humbled by the great thing we have encountered. We do not become filled with pride. Being attracted, being seized by the Lord and carried in His arms, by its very nature, can never degenerate into a claim to possess, to domineer. We are never the owner of the word, the promise and the tenderness of God. Rather, we are made humble when we experience mercy for our sins. As Fr. Giussani said, "Christ came not for the 'just,' not for the people who know no suffering at their destruction and wounds, but for people who do suffer because they are destroyed and wounded."[169] That is precisely the moment in which you can become good, with your heart at peace, full of gratitude. "Meek, docile," as today's first reading said: with a meek, docile heart, which by grace can be serene even in anguishing circumstances or in pain, because it has trusted itself entirely to the Lord. I am "like a trusting lamb led to the slaughter," because "to You I have entrusted my cause."

Only through the mercy of the Lord, who embraces and forgets our sins, can the journey of the Christian life, begun perhaps a long time ago, be

[167] *Rm.* 9:16.
[168] *Mt.* 18:3.
[169] L. Giussani, *By Grace. Always*, in *He* Is*, If He Changes,* op. cit., p. 56.

interspersed with new beginnings, with fresh starts as the years go by. As Fr. Giussani repeated, "continuity with what happened at the beginning comes about only by the grace of an impact that is as new and wondrous as it was the first time." Otherwise, Giussani explained, one begins to theorize and "in the place of that wonder would dominate the thoughts that our own cultural evolution enables us to muster, the criticisms that our own sensibility formulates of the experiences we have lived and we see being lived, the alternative we might presume to impose, and so on." Ultimately, sin would dominate, one's own error, for which man does not know how to forgive himself. Instead, Giussani explained, "the supreme paradox of the Christian message is that "*sin is forgiven* […] This is the surprise, the experience of compassion, which anyone can have in the relationship with Christ."[170]

Thus, in mercy, God manifests His omnipotence. The miracle of charity, which the Church has always acknowledged and exalted in the works of spiritual and corporal mercy, is the miracle that best manifests the glory of God to everyone: the miracle of derailed lives that are redeemed, of sons and daughters who seemed lost and condemned, and who are healed by the embrace of gratuitous love.

If it is not this way, if hearts are not renewed and softened by the experience of the Lord's mercy, then what happened to many Pharisees, and is mentioned in today's Gospel, happens again. If things go well, you become a saddened or somewhat bitter militant of correct ideas, someone who claims to have everything in order, with your ducks all lined up. In the worst cases, for reasons of self-interest and power, you continue to play a role, to wear a certain mask, the mask of our presumed sureties, and think you should dictate laws to the others. The Pharisees rejected Christ who came in the flesh, because according to their knowledge, according to what they knew, the Saviour could not come from Galilee. They already know it, already know everything beforehand. So they deride and mistreat the wonder of the others. If the poor people are moved, if the people of God express their gratitude in the face of the miracle of grace, which communicates itself when it wants, how it wants, to whom it wants, the Pharisees are indignant and say, have we perhaps given you authority to get excited, to rejoice, to be grateful? "Have any of the authorities or Pharisees believed in him?" they ask in the Gospel we read. "But this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed." And to Nicodemus, who bears witness to the Lord with the force of his individual conscience, they respond scornfully, "You are not from Galilee also, are you? Look and see that no prophet arises from Galilee!" "Look! Study!".

[170] *Ibid.,* pp. 45, 62, 64.

For them, everything is resolved in the acquisition of a certain competence, of knowledge, a correct method, terminology. In commanding "religious" discourse well, without errors, they lay claim to dominate the others. They are the ones, as Pope Francis said, who stand at the door of the Church and do not allow others to enter, and above all do not let Jesus out.[171]

In our days, as in the days narrated in the Gospel, confronted with the works of Jesus, the hearts of many were revealed. Some hearts may leap with gratitude for the miracles and new signs that the Lord works in His Church. Others may continue to cultivate their own presumptions. These two roads open up every day before each of us. The Lord told us so in the Gospel: in the vicissitudes of the Church in the world, the Word of God remains alive in the heart of the simple and humble. As the Pope said recently, "The simple crowd followed Jesus because what Jesus said did them great good and warmed their hearts."[172]

Let us ask Mary and her Son to attract our hearts, to make us feel that we are carried in their arms, even in the smallest details of our daily life. As asked in one of the hymns you also sing, "bring this heart closer to you, Jesus."

Let us ask for the gift of walking in the joy of the Lord, in the midst of the people of God spread throughout the world.

Amen.

BEFORE THE FINAL BLESSING

Julián Carrón. Thank you, your Eminence. I know how attentive you are to the Movement, not just here in Italy, but also in its international dimension. Our friends throughout the world often meet you. Above all, we are thankful for your ministry, which brings you to serve so closely the person of Pope Francis, whom we desire to follow with all our beings, continually overwhelmed and won over by the passion with which he lives the presence of Christ in the life of the Church and of every person, sending us back to those "existential peripheries" in which the charism given to Fr. Giussani gave birth to us.

Thank you, your Eminence.

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[171] Cf. Francis, *Morning Meditation: "Disciples of the Lord and not of an Ideology*," Domus Sanctae Marthae, October 17, 2013.

[172] Francis, *Morning Meditation: "The imprisoned word,"* Domus Sanctae Marthae, March 21, 2014.

Cardinal Parolin. If you still have a bit of patience, I would like to add a few things before giving the final blessing.

The first thing is my surprise at seeing so many of you. This assembly is truly impressive!

Carrón. There is another room like this one, next door!

Cardinal Parolin. So my surprise is doubled!

The second thing is to say "Thank you," truly thank you for this invitation. It was a bit difficult for me to accept it because I must limit my engagements, but I do not regret having come.

The third thing is to tell you–I mentioned it briefly in the homily, and Fr. Julián just now said it–that the Pope charged me to bring you his greeting, his affectionate greeting, his encouragement and to tell you that he truly knows he can count on you for that pastoral conversion in the missionary sense to which he has called the whole Church in *Evangelii Gaudium,* the document that has been defined "programmatic" for this pontificate. A missionary impetus that goes in the sense of attraction. It seems to me that you, too, in the last part of your talk–I listened to it in the little room behind the stage–said precisely this: we must attract others to Christ as we have been attracted to Him through His grace and through His mercy.

Finally, I would like to invite you to pray. Saint Paul says, "The more numerous we are, the more our gratitude and prayer rise up to the Lord." Imagine what power can be in the prayer that rises up from this room this evening! I ask you to pray for all the intentions for which we have celebrated this Eucharist, but in particular for two intentions. First of all for Venezuela. You mentioned my experience as Nuncio in Venezuela. I met Communion and Liberation, we worked together, and did some initiatives together. I would like to use the means of communication and the video link-up to send a hearty greeting to our Venezuelan friends and to say that we are close to them in this difficult moment for their country, and pray that the sense of the common good may truly prevail, that peace and reconciliation may prevail. Also, please pray for the two priests of my diocese who have just been kidnapped in Cameroon, on the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. We hope that everything will work out well, but we are very worried. This afternoon I spoke with my bishop, the bishop of Vicenza: he told me that there is a great deal of concern, great anxiety about this. But it is beautiful that one of them, a few months ago, when something similar happened to the French priest Vandenbeusch, before he was kidnapped, in response to invitations to be prudent and also more

than prudent, that is, to leave the lands where they could meet with danger, had written: "But if we came here to share the life of these brothers and sisters, can we leave them in the moment of danger?". This is the beauty of our faith, the beauty of those who believe in Jesus, who are willing to give their lives without regrets, with totality. So then, let us pray for them, that this situation truly may be resolved in the best way.

Finally, pray for the Pope and if you still have a bit of time, pray also for me, because I need it very much.

Carrón. We promise you we will pray. But can we also entrust you with a request? To bring a warm greeting to Pope Francis from all of us.

Cardinal Parolin. I will be very happy to do so. Well, then, let us gather everything together in the blessing that we now receive in the name of the Lord. If you will allow, let us end the blessing singing. You know the response, don't you?

Sunday, April 6, morning

During entrance and exit:
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Great Mass in C minor, K 427
Herbert von Karajan–Berliner Philharmoniker
"Spirto Gentil" n. 24, Deutsche Grammophon

Don Pino. Let us keep before our eyes the gaze between Peter and Christ, and Pope Francis' words that are reproduced on the Easter poster: "'Jesus Christ loves you; He gave His life to save you; and now He is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.' When we say this announcement is the 'first,' this does not mean that it is at the beginning and then we forget it or substitute it with other contents that supersede it. It is the first in the qualitative sense, because it is the *principal* announcement, the one we must always return to and listen to. It is the announcement that responds to the yearning for the infinite of every human heart."

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ ASSEMBLY

Davide Prosperi. As every year, we conclude this gesture with an assembly. I must say personally that year after year I realize what a truly important and fundamental part of the gesture the assembly is because one can clearly understand that the more we participate, the more we are present, the more we let ourselves be struck and questioned by what is said, by what happens, by the gesture, then the more the content of the proposal that is made and reaches each of us grows and increases the chance of its impact on our life. The questions are the reflection, the mirror of how we have been struck or not struck, that is, of what happens in us. For this reason, asking is a contribution that each of us surely can make.

Out of the numerous questions that arrived and we read, as usual, we selected a few. First of all, though, allow me to make a brief introductory comment. We understand that we have been placed before a demanding proposal. This is a good, because we are here for a journey, not to stay immobile with what we have already understood. It is right that it should be demanding. The most useful effort for each of us is to try to empathize with the person making this proposal now, otherwise we will not understand.

In particular, from the questions it emerges clearly that we have been struck by the re-reading of our history, which most have felt as an act of love for our life, and passion for our destiny. The first question emerges from this, phrased in many ways and summarized as follows: "Why do you feel the urgent need for this step of awareness precisely now?".

Julián Carrón. I feel the urgent need for this step of awareness primarily for myself: the questions before us are those I ask myself, too. Given the situations we have found ourselves living, as we said last year, I was the first to be struck by Fr. Giussani's position, according to which the problem was not "who is right," but "how can one live." In this world in which we are called to live the faith, the true need is "how can one live," that is, how to stay before the challenges of life. I am the first to ask myself this question. Beginning with this, another question arose, the one we are asking this year: what are we here in the world to do, and how? That is, what type of presence is the Christian presence?

I don't know about you, but for me these are still open questions; the more I am pressed by challenges, the more these questions are alive and urgent. So then, given that I was asking this question ("What are we here in the world to do?"), someone who was working on producing the new book of Equipes, struck by what he was reading, gave me that 1993 text that I quoted yesterday, in which Giussani faced the question that some of us sometimes ask today: Wasn't CL much better before? Now it is reduced to something pious, closed in the sacristies, given exclusively to the spiritual, not the material. He said this in 1993! I wasn't even involved then! I tell you this so as not to waste time, because these charges were made with Fr. Giussani present! Therefore, the true decision we must make, friends, is whether we want to follow Fr. Giussani, if each of us wants to follow.

What struck me in that text? How he, re-reading history, responds to this question. You heard it yesterday. All the things I told you yesterday are his. I have nothing else to propose to you, if not what Fr. Giussani proposed. I have nothing more interesting to tell you, if not what helps me to live and respond to the pressing questions of the present.

In the face of that provocation, Fr. Giussani asked, what are we here in the world to do? And he said that we are not in the world to respond to the needs of people, we are in the world to say… and, as you heard, he began telling the story of John and Andrew.[173]

[173] See here, pp. 34–35.

I was the first to be "jarred" by this reading and I told you how much. So I said to myself, I have to tell the others about this! What other way do I have of responding to the open questions if not by telling you everything I myself discover in Fr. Giussani, to help us understand why he told us certain things? This will be the work we must do all this year. Why did Giussani tell us what we heard yesterday? I hope that in these days we have already begun to understand something.

Next, the text emphasized that those who live John and Andrew's same recognition, offer the world a presence that shows how in following Christ one lives better, one responds better to the needs of life, testifying how one can live. Following Christ, taking Christ seriously, one lives better; a person begins to experience the hundred-fold here on earth.

A second step that was decisive for me in preparing these Spiritual Exercises was re-reading *The Long March to Maturity* from 1972, in which Fr. Giussani judges what happened in 1968. I challenge anyone to find a more pertinent judgment–and more capable of illuminating the present–than the one Giussani made then. I did not return to it just for a stroll down memory lane. What he told us in that precise moment about the reason for the bewilderment of those years is decisive for us today: it is normal that this bewilderment should happen, because reality provokes us and does not always find us up to the challenges. It is not that first the Mystery prepares us for illness and then sends it. No, He permits it and then gives us the time necessary to understand it, to understand its meaning: Christ has given us everything, He has given us His presence, and with His presence He will accompany us to understand the meaning of the illness, of losing a job, or of a defeat. Fr. Giussani said that we tried to respond to that bewilderment with our activity, without understanding what was in play. So, we need to understand why Fr. Giussani told us what he did, when we thought instead that everything that we did was the expression of what we had encountered. He corrected us radically!

In 1976 he clearly corrected the course we were on. For this reason, when in 1993 some intellectuals maintained that the Movement should go back to doing things the way it did before 1976, with all that activity to try to respond to needs, Giussani, as we saw, replied reminding them of what burned in his soul in 1976: "CL is not this. Christianity is not an organization to meet the needs of women and men. We are not in the world for this." In 1972 he said that the attempt to deal with the bewilderment provoked by 1968, "jumping headlong into following the world," was the sign of a moralistic response, totally void of our own culture and without a nexus with authori-

ty.[174] Why did all this happen? Because we were unaware of the importance, the historic heft of the Christian fact and, with our usual impatience, we wanted to change things right away, by our own strength (according to the mentality typical of any revolutionary attempt). Instead, as Fr. Giussani says, the Christian event changes life, but "the entire trajectory of history is required"[175] for this to develop.

So then, if we do not understand that now the most decisive thing for facing the new challenges is to comprehend the importance of the Christian fact, we will return to doing things that do not respond—and this is tragic, because history has already demonstrated that they do not respond, as I will also say later. This is why it is necessary to return to the origin, friends! In fact, we each have our own image of the Movement. It is inevitable. All of you, or at least many of you, have lived many years in the Movement, and some of you have been in the Movement much longer than I have. It is inevitable that each person has memories and has formed an image, and not motivated by ill will. It is simply that each person remembers the situation starting from certain facts, certain events. It was not that Fr. Giussani, when the things that we spoke of this weekend took place, was not saying anything, or that when we participated in certain gestures we were not there, full of desire to understand. How often people tell me, "But where was I?!." Some of the oldest repeat, "But where was I when Fr. Giussani said these things? I didn't understand anything at all!". And I tell them there's no use in complaining about this, because we could understand what we could understand. The problem is not that we were distracted–that may well be, too, but this is not the issue. Even if we were completely attentive, striving to understand, we would have understood what we could have understood, because the point of our personal evolution, of our personal journey, of our history, allowed us to understand what we were able to understand. This is why Savorana's book is so decisive. As Fr. Giussani told us yesterday–mine was a quotation–a "great purification"[176] is needed in order not to reduce Fr. Giussani to our image, because he is much more than what each of us thinks of him. We need to be open to conversion, to "submit reason to experience,"[177] because there are many things we have yet to understand. There are those who fear this, because they perceive it as my judgment on our history, as if I were here to point a finger at mistakes. No, no, no. I have

[174] See here, p. 30.
[175] See here, p. 33.
[176] See here, p. 36.
[177] Cf. J. Guitton, *Arte nuova di pensare [The New Art of Thinking]*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi) 1996, p. 71; see here, p. 92.

said nothing of my own. I want to learn! But I am not afraid of acknowledging when there was something for which Fr. Giussani invited us to correct ourselves, because my substance does not lie in doing, not even in doing in the right way: my substance lies in a love! Precisely for this reason, I have no problem apologizing even in the newspapers if we have made a mistake in something, just as I have no problem with apologizing to you! If we are not open to this, the charism is already dead and buried, each of us blocked and closed in our own idea. Our attempt has always been with a certain detachment and thus perfectible. In all our efforts, we should not be afraid to always strive to understand better, to follow better, to identify better the road to take. Therefore, I ask you to pray for this for the whole Movement, and for each of us, because if we are not open to conversion, as we concluded yesterday afternoon, mission will be impossible. Mission is bound exclusively to our conversion. "The condition of mission is the change of my person." But we think saying this does not mean making a proposal, and yet these, too, are the words of Fr. Giussani. I do not tell you anything other than what I discover in Fr. Giussani and that makes me live.

Prosperi. "In the face of the many challenges you spoke of, what is the first thing, the first move?"

Carrón. First of all I'll tell you about some of the questions I am asked or that people write me in their letters: how is it possible to not lose all the beautiful things that happen in life? How can we avoid the sensation of losing everything? How can I stay in front of pain, when everyone tells me it is better to give up? How can I stay in front of daily life that cuts my legs out from under me? One of us, going to visit a friend, heard someone say, "I would never bring a child into the world. With what courage can I condemn another poor creature to unhappiness? I am afraid of my freedom. In the best of cases it is useless, and in the worst of cases it can cause someone pain. What I expect from life is to try to do as little harm as possible." Or, yesterday I quoted a friend whose colleague had said "For newborns with grave disabilities, what kind of life is theirs?" How much fear, how many uncertainties!

Each of us can pretend that there is nothing or can stay in front of these questions. The issue is whether we are truly in front of the questions that are asked. In fact, the first thing to do is to understand the nature of the provocation that they bring with them, judging then whether our attempt to answer them is adequate or not. After all, we are the first to be challenged. What is the ultimate nature of the provocation contained in

these questions? What lies at the bottom of so many questions? Nihilism, my friends, that is, the fear that deep down, behind appearances, there is nothing. This is the most distinctive, the most characteristic feature of our culture, which at times those who present the biography of Fr. Giussani grasp better than we do. Mind you, if we do not understand the nature of the provocation, it is not that we do not move. We move, and how! But we do it in an inadequate way. We respond but in a way that is not up to the problem. We treat the tumor with aspirin. We get all worked up, and that is all. If this consoles you, because at least in this way we have done something…!

Therefore, the first question is judgment, judgment on what is happening, on the true challenge. Many times we do not realize the nature of the challenge; we, too, participate in the reduction of everyone. We are immersed up to our chins. We are tempted to think that there is nothing behind appearances, but also that deep down, Christ is equally nothing. The worst temptation of all is to think that Christ is abstract: not even Christ is saved from the spread of nihilism in us, and is reduced to abstraction.

So then, the crucial issue, made more acute by the current challenges, is to judge whether Christ is true or not, real or not. Because if Christ, who is the face of the Being who has fascinated us, is abstract, what wins is nothingness, and we become "a drifting mine." For this reason, when Fr. Giussani says that the problem of life is a love, he is not outside this world. On the contrary, he recognizes that only if something exists with the sufficient density of reality, sufficient attraction, sufficient power to bind us, can we hope not to be overwhelmed by nothingness, like everyone else.

What is in play in this love is faith, the acknowledgment of a Presence that makes us different, not because we are better, but because we are bound, chosen, attached to that Presence that keeps us from succumbing to the nothingness. What effect does this Presence have on us? How do I know that Christ is really present? By the fact that He reawakens me, that He saves all the dimensions of my humanity. Since He reawakens me, frees me from every reduction, then I can understand the provocation that reality contains.

Why wasn't Fr. Giussani bowled over like us by the reductions? Through some strange genius or precisely because of his bond with Christ, his passion for Christ? Even when all of us were shifted elsewhere, he did not shift from Christ: this gave him an intelligence of things, a capacity for judgment, a capacity to intervene in reality, that we could not even dream of having. Either the Movement is able to generate people like him, or we become part of the problem, not the solution, as I always say.

For this reason, friends, the question is whether we are willing to make that journey that can truly reawaken us, to be able to stay in reality with a new intelligence and with a capacity for response that is commensurate to the provocations of things. Otherwise our contribution will be zero.

Prosperi. "The sense of *powerlessness* accompanies every serious experience of humanity. This sense of powerlessness generates *solitude*" (Fr. Giussani). The sense of powerlessness that characterizes every serious human experience generates solitude. You speak of it as something positive, that opens. For me, instead, it generates anger, cynicism or distraction from reality."

Carrón. The first thing to look at with simplicity and with realism, friends, is our human experience. As we saw yesterday, the first effect of the common mentality on us is an extraneousness from ourselves, a separation from ourselves. We do not understand deep down, because our relationship with ourselves is abstract. Now, Giussani said, serious engagement with life–engagement not with one aspect of living, with a fixation that becomes hysteria–no, engagement with the totality of living makes us aware of our powerlessness. The first sign of engagement with your own humanity is the awareness of what you truly are, the sense of powerlessness. The more you engage with your own humanity, the more you sense that powerlessness, and see the structural disproportion between what you do and what you desire. It is hard for us to understand this. How do we see that we struggle to understand, that this is not familiar in us? By the fact that we seek to solve the powerlessness with our attempt, with our effort, with doing even more. But if this is precisely the problem, if precisely this powerlessness comes to the surface the more you try to do, how can you think you can respond to it with doing, with increased activism? You will only amplify it. Therefore, I understand, often this situation–that the more we are active the more we feel powerless, the more we throw ourselves into activity, the more we feel the powerlessness–generates anger, cynicism or distraction (not wanting to look this powerlessness in the face, we turn away.)

The question says that I, instead, speak of powerlessness as something positive. What must happen so we look at this powerlessness in a different way, not with cynicism or anger, not with efforts to distract ourselves? A presence is needed, as in the example of the child in the amusement park, a presence that can make us embrace it because this powerlessness is saved only by a presence. Without a presence that enables me to look at reality just the way the Mystery made it, I do not look at this powerlessness well. Now, the Mystery did not make us with this powerlessness out of distraction or

amusement or to mortify our humanity. No, God made us with this powerlessness and this structural disproportion because He loved us so much that He put in our bones, in every fiber of our being, such a boundless disproportion, such a great, infinite openness, that it could be filled only by His presence, so that we could enjoy life in a way we never would have dreamed of. If the gaze of this Presence is missing, we get angry at this powerlessness; we do not understand that instead it is given to us in order to be able to recognize Him: this emptiness, this sadness, this disproportion, this lack are the urgent need and the longing for Him, His presence, to which He wants to respond. Only when we find the answer does everything become a resource for the journey. And so one is grateful for the longing, grateful for needing Him, grateful for being able to return to Him. "I am grateful for feeling all my powerlessness, because in this way I realize how much charity You have with me, O Lord. And I am happy because You live, O Christ."

We cannot say all these things with all our "I," with all our awareness, if we do not feel the human needs. The most significant human experiences are precluded if these needs are not felt. I am amazed that so often we have difficulty precisely at this level, after having encountered Fr. Giussani, because if there is someone who took seriously all his humanity, all his human vibration, who makes us aware of the human drama, it is precisely Giussani.

What gratitude to be able to start again each morning needing Christ and longing for His presence! Imagine what would have happened if someone had told Mary Magdalene that her sense of solitude was useless! How can you tell a woman who was awake all night "seeking the love of her heart" that the longing for the beloved is an obstacle for her journey! When two people love each other seriously, we would never say that the longing and yearning one feels for the other and vice versa is an obstacle for the journey, a source of anger. The longing and the need we feel are the greatest sign of what we have encountered: "Thank goodness you exist, O Christ!". We could not say "Christ," and let all of our being vibrate, if we censured our nature. Certainly, one can get distracted anyway!

Prosperi. So, Julián, this solitude is the desire of this totalizing Presence that embraces our nothingness?

Carrón. Fr. Giussani, quoting Saint Thomas Aquinas, said that sadness is "the desire for an absent good."[178] This is the structure with which the

[178] Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *In Dionysii de divinis nominibus*, 4, 9; *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 20, art. l.

Mystery made us. God's design is to make the human person a participant in His happiness. Therefore, the first thought of God is Christ incarnate, to enable humanity to participate in all the richness He lived in the mystery of the Trinity. The beginning is not a lack. The beginning is the desire of God to share with us, who did not exist, all the fullness of the richness that He lived. God could have created other stars or other sparrows or other fish, but in this way He would not have been able to share all He shares with us, making us participants in an experience and an intensity of living never imagined before. But, as a principle of theology says, the first in intention is the last in realization: when we have to build a house, the first thing that comes to mind is the intention–the house–but the house is the last thing that gets built. First you have to find the land, call an architect, define the plan, and only at the end build the house. It is the same with the design of God: the intention is God's will to share His happiness. But to attain the fulfilment of this desire it was necessary to create the world, and within this world create a being with boundless desire, who was capable of recognizing Him when He decided to come, incarnating Himself. When Christ arrived, everything was clarified. Christ is the keystone for understanding the design. If we look at our powerlessness without this "place," without this Presence, which makes it intelligible, comprehensible, if we look at it alone, then we view it with anger because we do not know who can respond to it. Instead, when a person falls in love, he says "Ah, finally! Now I know why it was worth being born: to meet you!" But first, during adolescence, he did not understand why he had such enormous desires. At a certain moment, it is revealed. Either we realize that the Mystery responds to our expectation, to the infinite desire in each of us, and that life is resolved by this love, this encounter with Christ that fills existence with His Presence, or we will continue to get angry at our desire, which is made precisely to enable us to recognize Him, to be able to be filled with Him.

Prosperi. "The experience of those eyes and that gaze upon my life, as in these days, makes heaven enter into my eyes. What gives stability to the journey of the gaze that enables us to reach true conviction?"

Carrón. What makes the journey of the gaze stable is following, friends. This is why I continue to propose it to you over and over, because it is within reach of everyone. I am not the answer, nor is anyone among us. The answer to the solitude and powerlessness of which we have spoken is to run up against a Presence. If I allow these new eyes to enter, I begin to have a presentiment in myself of all the newness. How does this grow?

How does it become stable? Constantly putting it into play in reality. If in the face of every challenge, provocation, pain, unforeseen event, bewilderment, I do not start from what happened to me, from the Presence I ran up against, I will not be able to verify whether it is sufficiently substantial to respond to everything, and thus that gaze will never become stable in me. The way it happened to the disciples. They saw stupendous miracles, but at the next challenge they were back at the beginning, as so often happens with us. One could ask us, "But didn't you see what happened?", and we could answer yes. But this does not mean that it has become stably ours and that to face new challenges we start from there, from what already constitutes us down to the marrow of our bones. Fr. Giussani's entire effort sought to make truly ours–as awareness and experience–what constitutes us, what happened to us, what is ours and to which we belong through the fact of Baptism, what is already our new nature, once and for all. Because otherwise, Baptism exists, but in the face of the challenges of life it does not count at all; just as School of Community exists, but in the face of the challenges of the circumstances it does not count at all.

So then, the true question is for faith to become personal. Tell me if there is anything more crucial than this: that the recognition of His presence become stable in me, that it constitute me, that it generate a self-awareness in me that enables me to face all the new challenges, making my "I" grow. In fact, if Christ does not determine my "I," if the new creature is not possible, if the intelligence of faith does not continually become a greater intelligence of reality, a more intense capacity to adhere, then Christ is equal to zero. But this is Protestantism: we remain just as we were. Instead, no! If you follow, if you decide to participate in the Christian life, according to a design and a time that we do not know, that we do not decide, but that implicates all our engagement, all our freedom and all our intelligence (because we are not a mechanism), the gaze of Christ will become increasingly more stable in your self-awareness, to the point that you are amazed. A novice in the *Memores Domini* told me, wonderstruck, "How is it that I discover in myself dynamisms that are not mine, that is, I discover ways of reacting that I did not have before?"

The letter I read yesterday said the same thing. It is a description of the journey we are all invited to make. When a colleague challenged her, saying "It is right to euthanize newborns with grave disabilities," she, who up to that moment had only said banal things, without engaging herself in a true judgment, intervened in the discussion and told about her disabled daughter, who is in the condition he described, and who is happy. Then, as you know, the colleague returned a week later to speak with her, because he was unable

to forget what she had said. But now what interests me is the conclusion of her letter. "All the other times I happened to be in conversations of the kind, I always went away angry, without having had the courage to say anything, and only thinking with anger how it was possible for certain people to think in that way." She seemed to have only two alternatives, either remain silent or get angry, as if there were no other way. Instead, "this time it was possible for me to stay in front of the circumstance with all the truth of myself, because of the journey that I am making in following you and through the work of School of Community." The new subject emerges at a certain point, and she was the first to be surprised to discover this new way of responding. So then, the journey of the gaze becomes stable in this way, following. At a certain point, you discover you react to circumstances in a totally new way, not reactive, in one sense or in another, but original.

Prosperi. "Even though I have been in this story for some time, and have experienced the encounter, I notice that in the impact with circumstances, Christ is not the essential. What helps me to recognize that Christ is the essential? In what sense does following help this recognition?"

Another question is: "Does judging mean acknowledging Christ?".

Carrón. "I notice that in the impact with circumstances, Christ is not the essential." Would you like Him to be the essential? The whole question comes down to this: how much we desire that Christ become the essential. It is a problem of desire. Because if you begin to glimpse the promise within the fact that Christ becomes essential for you, the dearest thing, then all the rest is no longer an objection, and you get to work. You start paying attention to all the indications that we give, to all the suggestions that are offered, because it is impossible to be here and not receive input from all sides. You just need to be there with the desire that Christ become the dearest thing. Nobody can impose this, nor can any rule reawaken it. It is simply that when you see what happens in another person, when you see someone else living this way, you cannot help but want like crazy to be like him: "I want to live this way too! I also desire to live this way!" Following is born of this desire to live the way we see someone else living. So then, it is easy to recognize when Christ is essential: when Christ becomes the center of my affection. Yes, the center of my affection, because as we have said since the beginning, the criterion was given in the Gospel: "Where your treasure is, there is your heart. Where your heart is, there is your treasure." What prevails in us as affection? What do we hold dearest? What do we discover that we desire most? It is easy to recognize where the heart is. So then, as I said, the question is how much we desire that Christ become the essential: you just have to desire it!

We come to the other question. Judging means making the comparison between everything that happens in life and those elementary needs and "evidences" that we call "heart." But when does this judgment, this comparison, attest to a correspondence that leads us to recognize that what has happened to us is precisely what we are looking for? When you encounter Christ, because nobody else corresponds to our heart like Him. I know that I have encountered Christ, I know that Christ dominates in me, because I am free, I am glad. I know I have encountered Him, not because I do not limp anymore, not because I no longer make mistakes, but because His Presence dominates my life, and so I can even judge my mistakes without being defined by them, by none of them, because my substance is in Another. It is in a relationship: my substance is a love.

Prosperi. Two more questions that are related to each other.

"You said that either our companionship becomes experience or it becomes dangerous. What does that mean, and why?"

"How can the life in our Fraternity groups help us not take things for granted, and help us overcome immaturity?"

Carrón. What Fr. Giussani said recounting the episode of when he was a young priest and heard confessions is very illustrative of what he cared about from the very beginning, when he had not yet started the Movement, at the age of twenty-three. Instead of looking for a priest with much more "experience," because he had heard all sorts of awful things, people went to Giussani, a young priest. What was the difference? He judged. Thus from the beginning, Fr. Giussani sought to offer us a method for judging–because without judgment there is no experience, as we said yesterday. But we struggle to understand it. This is precisely why he said that our companionship either becomes experience, a place where we are constantly invited to live experience, that is, to judge, or is it "truly dangerous." He also explained why: "because those who are involved are like sheep in a flock."[179] If we are here without judging, we are here like sheep in a flock. This is dangerous because today someone blows this way, tomorrow someone else blows that way, and we are like a drifting mine! No matter who blows, be it me or the latest arrival, we lose our dignity if we do not have the ability to judge, if we do not shoulder the responsibility to judge. Giussani did not start teaching high school with the objective that the students should accept what he said as correct, *a priori*, but to offer them a method they could use to judge everything

[179] See here, p. 63.

he said. This is why a companionship like ours, if it does not offer a method for judging, if it does not stimulate our capacity for judgment, is dangerous: if it does not educate to this, along the way we lose the most decisive thing about the charism. It does not matter who blows today or who blows tomorrow, we will be alienated either way. The companionship becomes a danger and becomes useless. The true challenge before the Movement, and before each of us in our Fraternity group, School of Community, and life together, is whether it is capable of generating people who can judge. Otherwise we will always be at the mercy of the last comment, the last quip, the reaction of one or the other: think of how many of us there are! Instead, judgment is the beginning of liberation, as it says in the first chapter of *The Religious Sense.* If we want to be free among ourselves and in the world, in the circumstances in which we are, we must judge, or we will always be at the mercy of the latest guru, whoever that may be. Think what you want, but I do not want to follow a guru, no way! I want to follow what emerges constantly in experience, because–if I am loyal, if I am willing to "submit reason to experience," as Fr. Giussani always used to say, quoting Guitton–it is what enables me never to make a mistake. This is why the great educational challenge for you, for me, for your children, is whether the Movement becomes a place where you learn to judge, otherwise everything we do is useless.

Prosperi. We'll conclude with a series of questions on what you said yesterday about our initiative in reality.

"When I encountered the Movement in the 1970s, I participated in some demonstrations and became fond of it when my faith became public. Now, in the face of the provocations of the new rights and working in a school, it is urgent for me to take a position. I attempt a response: is this a reactive presence? How do you understand that a presence is original?"

Another one: "We have always considered activity as a verification of our being. You say that people are struck by our state of life, not by our activities. So then, what are our activities? What sense do they have, if the one criterion of judgment is what we are and our state of life? You insisted on doing, which has had a big part in my life, with my job, charitable works, the Companionship of Works, etc. The encounter with Christ puts a fire inside you and you cannot help but engage in works. The fact of Christ pushes you to activity. For certain aspects, doing coincides with mission and works. For that matter, through doing, you understand better the fact that happened to you. You understand your 'I' in action, doing things. Why, then, this description of doing that seems negative?"

Finally, "I don't see a risk of activism in the Movement today; if anything, the opposite."

Carrón. Here we all "do things," as in the Gospel everyone does things: the Pharisees do things, the disciples do things, Jesus does things, everyone does things. But Jesus says, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and pharisees [if your doing things does not become different from theirs] you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven."[180] That is, here the problem is not to oppose action and inaction, because inaction is impossible. The problem is to understand what action is adequate to the provocations, what action responds adequately to the pressing needs of reality.

To look at some examples, the Gospel is the "festival" of the contrast between the doing of the disciples and the doing of Jesus. Did Jesus perhaps not want them to do things? In the Garden of Olives, Peter responded to the provocation by immediately drawing his sword: he pulls it out and cuts off someone's ear! It is doing. But Jesus tells him, "Are you crazy?! Don't you realize how many legions of angels my Father has?"[181] Is Jesus against doing? Or does Jesus' reaction reveal a way of doing that is born of a perception of the design of God that the disciples completely missed?

On another occasion, Jesus sent the disciples on mission, and returning they were all "pumped up" by the things they had done. "We saw how the kingdom of Satan collapsed before our eyes." But Jesus said to them, "Is this what makes you rejoice? Rather, rejoice not about what you have done, but because your names are written in heaven." [182]

Once again, Jesus' temptation in the desert is the devil's attempt to make Him "do" something. Why does He refuse? "Command that these stones become loaves of bread!"[183] He could have set up a great NGO. He could have resolved the problem of world hunger. There would have been no need for the Food Bank. And it is not that Jesus does not do things, just think of when he multiplied the loaves. Is Jesus against doing? Perhaps we should take a few "little steps" to understand what activity is born of the consciousness of Jesus and what activity is born from a consciousness different from His.

Let's stop saying that "in Carrón's opinion" we should oppose doing and not doing. "Carrón says that we should not focus on doing." God is a great

[180] *Mt.* 5:20.
[181] Cf. *Mt.* 26:52-53*; Jn.* 18:10.
[182] Cf. *Lk.* 10:17-20.
[183] Cf. *Mt.* 4:3.

worker. And doing is part of our DNA as humans. The issue is whether our doing is born of the Christian newness or if it is born of something else. I had never thought–the passages of our history that I spoke of yesterday made me understand well–that, as Fr. Giussani said, the "anxiety to act" of those years was born of an existential insecurity, a fear, that led us to throw ourselves into doing, as we often say to each other even now, "Something has to be done," because otherwise fear seizes us all.

So then, should we not do anything? No. The issue is that if I am certain that my security is elsewhere, I can do things in a different way. For example, what should be done in the face of the challenges of new rights? You can move reactively, or you can try to understand the ultimate provocation it contains, because also the people who seek these things do so out of a desire for fulfilment, as those in 1968 sought liberation. If we do not grasp this and do not understand that the fulfilment they seek cannot be reached through the reduced image they have of their own desires/rights, all discussion is useless. It will be an opposition that budges no one, not even an inch. What can free them? What did and does Jesus do? He reawakens people in their original awareness, in such a way as to enable them to recognize that certain images of rights are absolutely insufficient, precisely because of the nature of the "I," because of the infinite nature of the "I." Only in that moment will those who demand certain rights no longer need to see them recognized by law, because they will recognize that even if they succeed in obtaining them, they are useless for responding to the dramatic nature of their "I."

What is to be done in the face of these situations? When Rose saw that the people she was caring for had lost their reason for living, she understood that the one important thing to do for those women was what Fr. Giussani told us in these days: bear witness that life is not about doing, but about love, being loved, that the substance of the "I" lies in being loved. What more important thing is there than communicating Christianity not reduced to the purely spiritual, not reduced in its historic importance? What had the greatest effect on those women? What most provoked that man who did not understand why one can have a disabled child? It was testimony. Testimony is a doing that covers everything; it is anything but a withdrawal to the den for winter hibernation! But doing like Rose or doing like our friend requires that we live our lives based on something else. Is this public, or is it closed in a den? It is in front of everyone, in any forum. All our initiatives are either the expression of this, or they do not serve at all as responses to the provocations.

I'll conclude by saying that the most important thing to do, the reason the Fraternity exists, is the Movement. This is "the work," more than any

other work, because for those women in Uganda, the most important thing is that the Movement exists there, that people can touch the mantle of Christ through one of our presences. So then, the issue is to generate the Christian community according to all the dimensions of which I spoke yesterday: culture, charity, and mission, with a new modality, with a new intelligence of the real, with an intelligence of faith that becomes intelligence of reality, with gestures of charity, as we said at Beginning Day, doing gestures of new humanity in the present, in whatever sphere we inhabit, with the desire to share what has been given to us in all the "peripheries"–as Pope Francis invites us to do–leaving our cubicle.

Do we have anything more interesting to do to respond to the challenges we find ourselves facing?

Announcements

Common Fund

I'll remind you of what I said in November, 2012: "Since the very beginning, the Movement has been supported exclusively by the economic sacrifices of the people who belong to it. Those who belong to the Movement commit to a monthly donation of a freely decided amount, the so-called 'Common Fund' that Fr. Giussani always indicated as a gesture that educates to a communal conception of what one possesses, to the awareness of poverty as an evangelical virtue, and as a gesture of gratitude for what one experiences in the Movement. Precisely for this educative reason, what is important is not the quantity one gives, but the seriousness with which one remains faithful to the commitment. To support the life of our communities in Italy and the world and its charitable, missionary, and cultural initiatives, the movement of Communion and Liberation needs nothing else, and for this reason we are free from everything and everyone in carrying out our task as a movement."[184]

In addition, on another occasion I said that "we obey the way the Mystery gives us the resources. If we have the resources to do five […], let's do five, not four and a half. But if we can only do three, let's do three," because our substance is not what we do. Every attempt of ours is an example. "Jesus did not heal all the sick people of His time,"[185] and we cannot respond to all needs. Our certainty does not lie in what we manage to do, but in a presence that is documented through an example, not in our capacity for vainglory in all we do.

The commitment to support the common fund of the Fraternity comes before any other particular activity or initiative in favour of your own community, be it a charitable, missionary, or other kind, this is precisely because of the reason I just said, that the construction of the Movement and of the Fraternity is the most decisive thing we can offer. The common fund of the Fraternity is for building the common work that is the Movement, and this, we have been taught, is much more to the glory of God than support of any other initiative. No work started by a person in the Movement is comparable to the work that is the Movement. Confusion

[184] J. Carrón, "With the Audacity of Realism. Notes from the Dialogue at the General Assembly of the Companionship of Works, Milan, November 2012, *Traces-Litterae communionis,* Vol. 14, No. 11 (December) 2012, p. VI.

[185] J. Carrón, "The Diversity of a Work. Notes from the assembly of the 'School of Works' for the Associates of the Companionship of Works." Milan, June 13, 2012, in *Traces-Litterae communionis,* Vol. 14, No. 7, (July/August) 2012, p. XII.

about the common fund is a direct consequence of the lack of clarity on this point: that the first thing "to do" is the Christian community. No other work is comparable to this: the Christian community as such. No work responds to the need of the human person like the Christian community. Forgetting this leaves us without a criterion, prey to sentimentalism. Each of you must choose.

Some letters received bear witness to how a personal commitment to the common fund helps one's own journey. "Yesterday I was put on unemployment. I had to pay the common fund: I was already six months behind. I wanted to, and I paid it." Why? What was the reason? "The comfort of my family and of the community is extraordinary." The reason is our gratitude for our common history.

Another young friend writes, "I wanted to let you know that in August I began working and in October I began receiving my pay, so with joy I am increasing my contribution to the common fund. I am grateful with this small gesture to be able to reaffirm my belonging to this companionship in which there is the You who continually restores me to myself." Once again, the reason is just gratitude to that You who restores me to myself. For this reason there is nothing more important that we can do than build the Christian community. The common fund serves exclusively for building this community.

Another person writes that she contributes to the common fund "out of gratitude for how much I receive from belonging to the Movement." And another, "Since my commitment to the life of the Movement is important and fundamental for my life, I want to keep contributing [to the common fund] as much as my situation allows." The common fund is "something that came first of all before any other thing."

There are those who have arranged to have their Christmas bonus deposited in the common fund, and those who decide to make their contributions to the common fund "grateful for the superabundance of grace that belonging to the Movement produces and because of which every day our life is more 'perturbed' by the extraordinary newness of His presence." A husband and wife write us, "With infinite gratitude for the journey of these years and for the faithful companionship to our life"; and another speaks of "thanksgiving to Christ and the companionship that has sustained us."

These are expressions of the ultimate reasons that move people to contribute regularly to the common fund. As you see, the issue is not about money, but once again, about what is the essential for us, acknowledged at the origin of the personal gesture.

Now I will explain the criteria that guide our use of the common fund.

The fundamental criterion that guides us is that "the work" of the Fraternity is the Movement as possibility of "testimony and recounting" to all of the positivity and usefulness of faith for life. We are not an NGO dedicated to raising funds to distribute.

From the beginning of our history, the common fund has been used according to these criteria:

> to ensure the functioning of the instruments necessary for the life of the Fraternity (which today has over 60,000 members) and of the Movement (the secretariat staff, utility bills, travel), taking care to maintain a certain simplicity;

> to support the realities that express the dimensions of the Movement (culture, charity, mission) with attention to what God makes happen in front of our eyes;

> to support the presence of the communities of the Movement abroad in about ninety countries, in a continual dialogue with them so that, in time, they can take care of their needs themselves.

> A concern that has always received a lot of attention is that of helping needy people or families of the Movement, in Italy and in the world, who find themselves facing situations of sudden need (the death of a spouse or the temporary loss of work), taking care that, if the need becomes prolonged over time, a network of friendship be created around them to help them first of all to judge the new situation and then to accompany them in possibly reformulating the needs of their family. In some situations it became clear that the true need was precisely this companionship, more than the economic need to which the Fraternity could respond. We always take into consideration all the requests that reach us, examining them with a great deal of realism because we care about using the funds well, since they are the fruit of each person's sacrifices. As you can well understand, not every desire or need in and of itself can receive help from the fund.

> Then there is support for charitable or cultural works deemed significant for a testimony to the richness of the charism, which in a certain moment in history have needed help.

Now I will make two clarifications:

> first: the help the Fraternity can give is never permanent. The criteria that have always been used, all learned from the way Fr. Giussani taught us to consider the use of money, have been to promote the responsibility of the person helped. We do not want our help to become an excessive form of welfarism, because in every choice there is always first of all concern for education: to help people emerge in their fullness;

> second: the Fraternity is not a bank! Therefore it cannot and does not want to give loans or fill the gaps in the balance sheets of firms or works in difficulty. We cannot intervene in firms in the red, but if this fact causes some economic needs for families, we can temporarily help the families.

Other aid is given to support priests engaged in the life of the Movement; for the needs of the Church (an offering for the Pope, donations to religious entities, etc.); and to face emergencies such as earthquakes.

Archive

Conserving the memory of what God causes to happen among us seems a fundamental duty. Think that this has first of all enabled us to publish many of Fr. Giussani's texts, today available also on the site *scritti.luigigiussani.org*, the three volumes of Fr. Massimo Camisasca's history of the Movement, and now Alberto Savorana's book on the life of Fr. Giussani.

In addition, since the request to open the cause of beatification, there has been a growing need to acquire all the unpublished material available, to conserve it correctly and catalogue it with precision.

I ask you to try to reflect well, above all the people of a certain age who have a long history in the Movement: think about your relations with Fr. Giussani, and any letters or notes you received, texts or recordings you keep in the attic, forgotten. I assure you that a lot of material is still in circulation. Also, it is important for us to receive the originals of letters, notes, or other things for many reasons, among them conservation. In any case, it is sufficient to send the archive a good copy.

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I will conclude by reading the telegram sent to Pope Francis:

"Your Holiness, your greeting and your blessing, which Cardinal Parolin brought us during the Eucharistic celebration, filled with joy and gratitude the hearts of the 24,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises and the other thousands participating by satellite link-up in 17 nations.

These days have been marked by your call to that which is 'essential, that is, Jesus Christ,' which constantly indicates the method for us: 'Convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with Him as to walk blindly.'

The story of Fr. Giussani calls us to the fact that faith is acknowledgment of a Presence that is relevant to the needs of life: growing closer to

Christ enables us to live today in all the peripheries of existence. John and Andrew, Peter, Zacchaeus and the Samaritan woman, show us the road to maturity: 'Following Jesus makes us know Jesus' and enables us to overcome the existential insecurity that makes us place our hope in our own activism.

In the face of the challenge of daily circumstances, we have come to a deeper awareness that to truly know Christ, as you said, 'what we have learned and studied in the Catechism does not suffice,' but 'we need to travel the path that Peter travelled,' striving in the race to make Him our own.

More conscious that the Movement walks exclusively by the strength of the affection for Christ and that 'people rediscover themselves in a living encounter,' we entrust to your hands, Holy Father, all of us and our communities, with a prayer that is 'begging, sure of a merciful response' (Fr. Giussani).

In these days of Exercises we have rediscovered that 'a justification of faith entails describing ever more amply and intensely the effects of the presence of Christ in the life of the authentic Church, the Church whose *guard* is the Roman Pope' (Fr. Giussani). For this reason, we ask Our Lady to renew in you every dawn the experience of being children of the Father that generates new life in gladness, as we see happen through each of your gestures and words."

HOLY MASS

Readings: Ez 37:12-14; Psalm 129 (130); Rm 8:8-11; Jn 11:1-45

HOMILY OF FR. FRANCESCO BRASCHI

At the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises we heard these words: Christ always surprises us with an entirely original presence. He shows us His divinity expanding our reason in an astounding way.[186]

This is the experience we are living in these Exercises, that we are learning to recognize in our life and in the life of the Movement. As we acknowledge this grace, we are called to consider its conditions and circumstances, not excluding on our part a work that is not free of toil and questions.

But we are not alone. Here too we experience the grace of the Lord in the companionship of two disciples of Christ: Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. Today's gospel documents for us that even in people sincerely fond of Christ, those who were part of the circle of His most intimate friends, there is the possibility of this reduction of faith. This reduction that can perhaps be pure reactivity–"Your friend is sick: Lord, come right away!"–that can become concrete in the disappointment that Christ does not seem to bend to our will, or to what we have already decided, because even the healing of an illness, even the resurrection of a person who has been dead for four days is not *the* answer. In fact, later Lazarus had to die again…

The unanimous reaction of Martha and Mary–"Lord, if You had been here…"–is a reaction of lament and disappointment. There remains only a last point of faith, so similar to the words of that father who said to Jesus, "I believe. Help my unbelief" (*Mk.* 9:24), when Martha says, "But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give You." What does this affirmation mean? Martha still does not believe that Jesus can raise her brother, because soon after she says, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." And again, once they reach the sepulchre, she objects, "Lord, he has been dead for four days." Rather, Martha is convinced that Jesus can maybe still find a way to console her, a kind of "plan B" to fall back on, that might lighten, without entirely removing, an occasion for lament and demand.

We know this attitude full well ourselves: it is a way of living the relationship with Christ in which there always remains something not entrusted to Him. This attitude does not concern so much the moral sphere, but strikes

[186] Cf. Introduction, p. 9.

the very nature of the judgment and the experience of faith we have, because it leads us even to build and imagine, in the face of the disappointments and bitterness of life, back-up solutions that enable us to offer Jesus "an honorable exit plan" from the disappointment that He himself has caused us.

In this attitude we see the most tremendous reduction of faith, the one that once again subordinates everything to our still-sick judgment, which starts out from a reduction of desire that not only the power has worked on us, but that we ourselves follow, becoming quite ready to settle for a mere "consolation prize," from Christ. The maximum gain of this settling–and this is absolutely dramatic, if and when we realize it–lies in the fact that we obstinately continue to feel that we are "creditors" of Christ, who owes us for all He cannot or will not give us.

But Christ does not tolerate, does not accept this reduction. We see this in the way He presses Martha: "Your brother will rise," that is, do not reduce your desire, do not lose the content of the promise from which faith flows. Know that God cares much more about your brother's life than you do: you do not hold exclusive rights to loving him!

The love of God will not be reduced to a promise far-off in time, so remote that it coexists peacefully with the reduction of faith to a "vague consolation," that then nourishes cynicism and querulousness.

The love of God, which gives life and conserves it, is not a concept, but a Presence. And Jesus says: "*I* am the resurrection *and* the life." He says in effect, "With this statement, Martha, I am telling you that My presence does not only concern the resurrection, and thus your brother who is dead, but it concerns life, and thus you too, who have as much need of Me to live as your brother does to rise from the dead."

The reduction of faith to discourse or to a vague consolation, in fact, goes hand in hand with the impossibility of truly knowing what life is, because it brings with it the reduction of life to what we can imagine about our existence, to what we can conclude hurriedly, without a true judgment. Instead, real life is simply and irreducibly that of Christ: a life in which the person is united and as it were suffused with the Divine, and thus reaches full stature through His presence (cf. *Eph.* 3:17-19).

"Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die," Jesus tells Martha. "Do you believe this?" Christ makes flash before Martha's eyes something much more than consolation for her brother's death. What He offers her to experience is the full realization of her desire for the infinite. But this is necessarily bound to faith: faith not in an abstract truth, not in an impersonal doctrine, but in a person, Christ Himself, who is standing in front of her.

Martha's answer is similar to the one Peter gave to the triple question, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" (Cf. *Jn.* 21:15-17) because Martha does not directly answer Christ's question either, but confesses honestly all she can say of Him: "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

And therefore, how can we affirm–I say this for us–how can we affirm and grasp Christ? How can we have a real experience of the truth, of that truth Christ says when He affirms "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in Me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me, will never die."? Because this is the only fully relevant affirmation for our life, inasmuch as it is the affirmation of His objective presence in reality.

I begin to experience this objective presence through a new judgment, that is, when I acknowledge this objectivity of His presence as *truer* than even my thought and my judgment. I acknowledge it and desire to be ever more fascinated and attracted by it, making it my very reason for living.

This objectivity of the presence of Christ, which Mary had standing right in front of her, is given to us in the Presence of a Sacrifice, that of Christ in the Eucharist. The only answer we can give to this Sacrifice is what Saint Charles Borromeo called "the sacrifice of the will."[187] Only this sacrifice of our will puts us in the most correct position to truly acknowledge our story, to ground ourselves more and more in the initiative of Another. But the word sacrifice has a meaning that is traditionally explained as *sacrum facĕre* "make something holy." And so sacrifice is not first of all a loss, but making something fully conformed to how God wants it. The sacrifice of our will, then, is not to nullify our will, but to make it the way God thought of it. It is not a loss, but a gain. Even more, it is the necessary condition to have ourselves back again. It is no coincidence that this sacrifice of our will should be renewed every time we are before the Eucharist, because that is the stability of Christ, that is His being a Rock for us.

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[187] Cf. Saint Charles Borromeo, *Preghiere [Prayers]*, Edizioni O.R., Milan 1984, pp. 20-21: "We repent, O Lord, of our way of behaving and we want to make amends for it. We ask forgiveness of all those we have offended and we prostrate ourselves at their feet to obtain it: and if someone unjustly lost their temper at us, provoking our indignation with words or actions, now, out of love for You, we forgive them sincerely. Thus reconciled we return to Your altar to present You with our offering, *to immolate to You our will, the thing dearest to us, to sacrifice to You our heart, the thing most pleasing to You.* From Your holy throne, O Lord, deign to accept our sacrifice and to look benevolently and mercifully on our gifts which, just as they are, must always be Your things. We want to give all of ourselves to You again, we who are the works of Your hands, and in no place but Your hands can find greater safety."

And the only adequate attitude in us that corresponds to this is to entrust to Him–to this objective and real Presence of His, time after time, circumstance after circumstance–our freedom, always in need of being not only healed, but nourished and strengthened to grow and mature to the full stature of the perfect person, of the person in Christ.

Thus let us press on to make Him our own: not like an evanescent presence, but as the foundation of our being. Let us run, striving to make Him our own with all our beings, desiring that the maturation of faith will show us more and more how necessary it is for our existence to place our total trust in His being here, in His judgment, in His happening in reality, rather than in our illusory representations.

Only in this way will we have a life to testify about, because we ourselves have experienced it.

MESSAGES RECEIVED

Beloved,

"*Press on to make Him my own*" (*Phil* 3:12) expresses fully the dynamism of the Christian life.

The image speaks of the love for Christ, capable of decisively orienting our desire. Unlike the dominant mentality that separates love from desire and makes them opponents in reciprocal exclusion, Jesus, the Eternal who entered into time, joins these two factors. This evokes in the Christian the capacity for "the forever" that does not fear sacrifice, does not see desire and duty as opposites. Rather, the race identifies that capacity for detachment that makes it possible to possess Jesus, the Beloved, in daily life.

"I possess in detachment," the Servant of God Monsignor Luigi Giussani taught us, to speak to us about virginity and the indissolubility of marriage, so that the Kingdom of God may be documented as the initial but real experience of our life and in the life of the Church.

As I ask you all for a prayer, I assure you of my personal prayer for these Spiritual Exercises and I bless you from the heart.

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola
Archbishop of Milan

Dearest Fr. Julián,

Being unable to participate in the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, I unite with all of you in this moment of grace in which the Lord precedes us, so that we may listen to the voice of the Spirit and assimilate the charism of Fr. Giussani to share the "joy of the Gospel" with those far and near.

In this time of grace, marked by the pontificate of Pope Francis and by the canonization of the two Sovereign Pontiffs who shook the life of the Church and promoted her profound renewal, the Spiritual Exercises are the opportunity to see ever anew the centrality of the person saved by Christ and sustained by the communion of the Church for the liberation of the world.

"I press on to make Him my own." This is the movement of the "I," conquered by Christ and striving to proclaim His name with the testimony of mission in our peripheries. I see how urgent this is in my diocese of Taranto, where many expect from the Church true light and hope in their harsh reality marked by various conflicts. The experience of the Movement is giving me the heart to be close to the people as Fr. Giussani was close to us with

affection and with judgment, and as you show us in the guidance of the Movement.

Fr. Julián, I take this occasion to congratulate you on being re-elected as responsible of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, and I assure you of my prayers for you and the whole Movement. In my 27 years of mission in Brazil and Latin America, and in these years of service to the Church in Italy, I have verified what a great grace the charism is for the world in the service of the Church and specifically of the Holy Father.

To all of you, my warm embrace and the Lord's blessing.

The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro
Metropolitan Archbishop of Taranto

Dearest Fr. Julián,

With this note, I participate as well as I can in the great event of the Spiritual Exercises, and hope it will be a great success for the truth of the faith life of the thousands who participate.

Many years ago, I read to Fr. Giussani a passage from a great speech John Paul II gave in 1980, that said "…there is a true challenge that the Church must face, and a gigantic effort she must make, for which she needs the collaboration of all her children: to make faith once again culture in the different cultural spaces of our times, reincarnating the values of Christian humanism."

Fr. Giussani told me: let's help this great man, let's put together all our energy, intelligence, heart, and affection so that this project of his can be realized.

Today, like then, the truth of our experience of faith, the warmth of our charity, and the impetus of our mission are called to give a significant contribution to the Church, which today is experiencing a moment at once tragic and exhilarating.

I keep in my heart, as I have done for 50 years, each of you.

I bless you all from the heart.

The Most Reverend Luigi Negri
Archbishop of Ferrara-Comacchio

TELEGRAMS SENT

His Holiness Francis

Your Holiness, your greeting and your blessing, which Cardinal Parolin brought us during the Eucharistic celebration, filled with joy and gratitude the hearts of the 24,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises and the other thousands participating by satellite link-up in 17 nations.

These days have been marked by your call to that which is "essential, that is, Jesus Christ," which constantly indicates the method for us: "Convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known Him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly."

The story of Fr. Giussani calls us to the fact that faith is acknowledgment of a Presence that is relevant to the needs of life: growing closer to Christ enables us to live today in all the peripheries of existence. John and Andrew, Peter, Zacchaeus and the Samaritan woman, show us the road to maturity: "Following Jesus makes us know Jesus" and enables us to overcome the existential insecurity that makes us place our hope in our own activism.

In the face of the challenge of daily circumstances, we have come to a deeper awareness that to truly know Christ, as you said, "what we have learned and studied in the Catechism does not suffice," but "we need to travel the path that Peter travelled," striving in the race to make Him our own.

More conscious that the Movement walks exclusively by the strength of the affection for Christ and that "people rediscover themselves in a living encounter," we entrust to your hands, Holy Father, all of us and our communities, with a prayer that is "begging, sure of a merciful response" (Fr. Giussani).

In these days of Exercises we have rediscovered that "justification of faith entails describing ever more amply and intensely the effects of the presence of Christ in the life of the authentic Church, the Church whose 'guard' is the Roman Pope" (Fr. Giussani). For this reason, we ask Our Lady to renew in you every dawn the experience of being children of the Father that generates new life in gladness, as we see happen through each of your gestures and words.

Fr. Julián Carrón

His Holiness Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI

Holy Father,

From Rimini, where we have celebrated the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, we would like to tell you that we have prayed for you, grateful to God because in you we have a trustworthy witness to Saint Paul's words that are the title of this year's gathering: "Press on to make Him my own."

May Our Lady make each day of your journey as a man seized by Christ ever more filled with gladness. Please remember us in your prayers, requesting holiness for each of us in faithfulness to the charism of Fr. Giussani and following Pope Francis on the road to Destiny.

Fr. Julián Carrón

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference

Dearest Eminence,

The 24,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini and thousands of others by satellite link-up in 17 nations, with the will to follow Pope Francis who is guiding us to know Jesus, are returning to our homes with the desire to make visible the essential, that is, Jesus Christ, the one who "responds to the yearning for the infinite of every human heart." (*Evangelii Gaudium*).

Fr. Julián Carrón

His Eminence Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

Dearest Eminence,

The 24,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini and thousands of others by satellite link-up in 17 nations confirm our commitment to follow Christ, living "our own constantly renewed experience of savouring Christ's friendship and His message" (*Evangelii Gaudium*). May faithfulness to the charism of Fr. Giussani and to Pope Francis sustain us in the attempt to make visible the essential, that is, Christ, who sustains the daily toil of living.

Fr. Julián Carrón

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola
Archbishop of Milan

Dearest Angelo,

Thank you for your message. In these days of Spiritual Exercises we have experienced anew that "it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known Him" (*Evangelii Gaudium*). Notwithstanding our fragility, we press on to make Him our own. Please ask Our Lady of Caravaggio to maintain in each of us faithfulness to the charism of Fr. Giussani in following Pope Francis, so that our existence may increasingly be a "testimony and recounting" to everyone of what is essential, that is, Christ, life of our life.

Fr. Julián Carrón

The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro
Archbishop of Taranto

Dearest Filippo,

We thank you for what you have written us. In the course of the Spiritual Exercises we have made memory of the charism of our life, in faithfulness to which we seek the personalization of faith to which Pope Francis invites us, to be like him, pressing on in the race to make Him our own, and thus become companions on the road toward destiny for our brothers and sisters of the world.

Fr. Julián Carrón

The Most Reverend Luigi Negri
Archbishop of Ferrara-Comacchio

Dearest Luigi,

We are grateful to you for your message, which found welcome in these Spiritual Exercises in the desire to make ours the invitation of Fr. Giussani to make faith personal, to the level at which it becomes systematic and critical judgment of reality, to respond to the missionary appeal of Pope Francis, testifying to "the essential," that is, Jesus Christ.

Fr. Julián Carrón

ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

Prepared by Sandro Chierici

(Guide to the images drawn from art history that accompanied selections of classical music during entrance and exit)

The images belong to the cycle of frescos Giotto painted between 1303 and 1305 in the Scrovegni Chapel (Santa Maria della Carità [Saint Mary of Charity]) in Padua. Through constant reference to the gazes of the characters, the leitmotiv of his pictorial narration, Giotto invites each of us to look into Jesus' gaze to learn to look at reality the way He looks at us.

1	Ceiling vault, detail of the stars
2	Full view of the vault with medallions with Christ (sun) and Mary (moon) and eight prophets (planets)
3	Medallion with Christ giving His blessing
4	Medallion with Mary and the Child Jesus
5	Arch above the altar: the angel of the annunciation
6	Arch above the altar: Mary receives the annunciation
7-8	The visitation, full view and details
9-10	The nativity, full view and details
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