



# **“LIVING IS THE MEMORY OF ME”**

Assembly of Responsibles  
of Communion and Liberation

LA THUILE (ITALY), AUGUST 2010

TRACES

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Cover illustration: Giovanni Serodine, *Supper at Emmaus*, 17th-century, Ascona © 2010. Andrea Jemolo/Scala, Florence.

Front cover quote: L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, [*The I is Reborn in an Encounter*], BUR, Milan, 2010, p. 43 and here p. 37.

*August 28, 2010, Saturday evening*

All the effort we've gone through in order to get here this evening—many people are from so far away—expresses the nature of our necessity, of our need. It would not be reasonable to make this sacrifice except for the promise of finding something here that may allow us to go back home different. Still, we can make all this effort and remain unaware, half-asleep. For this reason, the first expression of the awareness of our poverty and our decay is to cry out to the Spirit to make us aware of all our need, in order to make us open to what He will choose to bestow on us these days as an answer.

*Come O Creator Spirit*

We find ourselves at this International Assembly of Responsibles of ours in a cultural context that at the Fraternity Exercises we described with the sentence of Charles Péguy: “A world [...] after Jesus, without Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

The ecclesiastical context is wholly dominated by a word that the Pope has been repeating for months and that we cannot forget in this meeting, which is the word “conversion.” He told us when we went to St. Peter’s Square: “The real enemy to fear and to fight is sin, spiritual evil, which, at times, unfortunately, also infects members of the Church. We live in the world, but we don’t belong to the world (cfr., *Jn* 17:14). We Christians are not afraid of the world, even though we watch out for its seductions. Rather, we must fear sin, and thus be strongly rooted in God, united in goodness, in love, in service. It’s what the Church and her ministers, together with the faithful, have done and continue to do with fervid commitment for the spiritual and material good of people in every part of the world. It’s what you particularly try to do habitually in parishes, associations,

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Péguy, *Temporal and Eternal*, trans. Alexander Dru, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1958, p.131.

and movements: serve God and man in the name of Christ. Let’s continue together, full of trust, on this path, and may the trials that the Lord allows push us toward greater radicalism and consistency. It’s beautiful to see today this crowd in St. Peter’s Square, as it was moving for me to see the huge crowd at Fatima, at the school of Mary, where they prayed for the conversion of hearts. I renew again today my plea, comforted by your numerous presence! Thank you! Once again, thanks to all of you!”<sup>2</sup>

What the Pope addressed to us who were present there was a call to conversion precisely in this cultural and ecclesiastical context; because also we—as he often says—fall prey to the influx of this situation. Without conversion, therefore, we also collaborate in creating a world after Jesus, without Jesus. Who of us does not feel implicated in this reminder of the Pope?

Musing about these things, while I was preparing the summer Exercises of *Memores Domini*, I stumbled upon the text of one of Fr. Giussani’s lessons entitled, *All Things: Mystery and Sign*, where he tells us something similar to the Pope’s reminder: “In *Memores Domini* [in the Fraternity, in the Movement], you too can see it very well; there is no one who denies God (because otherwise, he wouldn’t be able to stay!), but there are people who are dazed, as if half-asleep, or superficial, whose spirit is not shaken by the thought of the meaning of life and by the recognition that all things that happen to you are an invitation to the relationship with the Mystery.”<sup>3</sup> Who can hear these things as if they were not addressed to himself? In some way, we share in this sleepiness and we do not feel our spirits shaken by the thought of life’s meaning, by this urgency. This being pervaded by slumber, this superficiality that we often live—which is the consequence of the influence that this cultural and social situation has on us (and that therefore we also collaborate in generating)—is what makes us understand that conversion is not something for other people, it is not a reminder made to others; it is, first of all, an urgent issue for us. I, at least, feel it that way for me.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli*, May 16, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> L. Giussani, “All Things: Mystery and Sign”, in *Traces*, Vol. 1, No. 6 [June] 1999, p. I.

And Fr. Giussani continues with this indication: “You must have initiative; you must take initiative so that your life be a relationship with God. Instead, we’re dazed or superficial because we neglect this problem, as if being there in the ‘house’ [being there in the Fraternity, being there in the Movement] made us already all right. *All right* my eye!!! If the house [or the Fraternity, or the community, or the small group of friends] doesn’t become a beginning of your day, a stimulus for your day, you’ll have no other step or relationship that anchors you to the fact that man’s life is relationship with the Mystery. You hear it said, that that is the question, only when there is something exceptional, when something exceptional happens to us. Instead of ‘God,’ let’s consider the word ‘vocation.’ We live our days without having taken up a new awareness, without regaining awareness of our vocation [of having been chosen, of the gift that happened to us].”<sup>4</sup> This is the great charity of Fr. Giussani, who helps us identify what our problem is: “Now the whole world has thrown into the massive ditch of misery all that man received from those who preceded him. For this reason, our problems are narrow-minded, not totalizing—they’re isolated. Today, I want to ask you to make an effort in praying to the Spirit and to Mary—*Veni Sancte Spiritus, Veni per Mariam*—so that you may understand, beyond the words that I’m saying, the link between God, the Mystery, and our life: our number one problem is this!”<sup>5</sup> Only hearing these words makes us understand how distracted we are. If one thinks what the number one problem of his day is, what occupies him most, what we discover as our dominant concern... Is this the number one problem for each one of us?

In front of this situation in the world and in the Church (in which we participate), our only strategy, says the Pope, is conversion. And the first sign of the fact that we need it is that already in front of the word “conversion” alone (take note of your reactions), we defend ourselves. It is the most evident sign of how much we need it. We see taking place in us what we have heard described so many times: “There’s no ideal we can sacrifice for, because we know the lies oall

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

of them, we who don't know what the truth is.”<sup>6</sup> In order to be open to conversion you need something so true, so fascinating, and so attractive that it renders the sacrifice desirable.

So our openness to conversion judges if we truly have knowledge of the truth, if we have something so dear to us that we can be even open to sacrifice. For this reason, the first thing we must help each other with is to know this truth (that allows us to not defend ourselves even at the sound of the word “conversion”), because it's so attractive, so fascinating that we don't want to lose it. And what is the truth? “Says God, through the voice of the prophet that in Christ is fulfilled (think of the people who stayed together with that Man, that young Man who fulfilled these things): ‘I have loved you with an eternal love, so I attracted you to Me [that is, I made you share in my nature], having pity on your nothingness.’”<sup>7</sup> There's nothing more original, more fruitful than this love which lies at the origin of everything that exists; therefore, it is the first truth of all of ourselves and of everything that is. This is the first thing we have to look at, that we have to help one another look at in these days, in order not to defend ourselves from the word “conversion.”

I will read you this passage from one of the letters that Fr. Giussani wrote to his friend Angelo Majo—which is truly a comfort because it can embrace any situation we're now in here: “I am not capable in this windy and dark evening, the beginning of winter, to respond to the precise mood in which you wrote me. I'm too tired [in this being tired, there's all the uneasiness any of us can experience]. But I only feel—and my faithfulness to my dearest friends is living proof—that the substance of life, of aspirations, of happiness, is love. An infinite love, enormous, which bent down to my nothingness, drew out a human being [generated me], as a speck of dust in its body, limitless in its eager openness to truth and love, which is intelligence and heart. An infinite Love, enormous, that did the absurd in rendering me—finite dust as a created being—infinite like

<sup>6</sup> Andres Malraux. *The Temptation of the West*, trans. Robert Hollander, Vintage Books, New York, 1961, p. 121.

<sup>7</sup> L. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live this Way?*, Vol. 3, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 2008-2009, p. 12.

Him.”<sup>8</sup> He was 23 years old when he said these things!

Whatever our mood, whatever uneasiness we feel, the difficulty we are going through, the perception that we have of ourselves, nothing can stop this infinite Love, enormous, that bent down on my nothingness. Friends, conversion is this: to let this infinite Love that bent down on my nothingness enter—enter this situation, this uneasiness, this moment in which I find myself, this weariness. Nothing can impede the fact that now, in this situation, there’s One who, with an eternal, immense love, bends down on your nothingness, on my nothingness, in order to give us being.

“How striking to think of the infinite distance that God overcame with respect to our nothingness! ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love,’ the Bible says, ‘I drew you to Me, I welcomed you, having pity on your nothingness.’ There’s no diversity greater than the one between being and nothingness! I think this is an aspect of awareness that has to be revived always.”<sup>9</sup> This is the initiative that Fr. Giussani suggests to us: we have to take initiative, because this awareness has to always be revived if we don’t want to lose it and defend ourselves. But as we’ve seen in this year’s work, in spite of everything, we often live in distraction, sleepwalking. “And then, when man least expected it, he could not even dream of it, he did not expect it any longer, he no longer thought of He from whom he had received being, this One re-enters man’s life in order to save it; He gives Himself again by dying for man. He gives all of Himself, a total gift of self up until: ‘No one loves his friends as much as one who gives his life for his friends.’ Total gift. But here, there’s one, final nuance [in order that not one of us be excluded from this total gift]: what Christ gives us by dying for us—dying because we betrayed Him—in order to purify us of the betrayal [not leaving out anything of ourselves, nothing of what frightens us, nothing of what embarrasses us, nothing of what we’re not even able to look at], what He gives us is greater than what we expected. [...] To understand what betrayal is, my friends, we have

<sup>8</sup> L. Giussani, *Lettere di fede e di amicizia ad Agelo Majo* [*Letters of Faith and Friendship to Angelo Majo*], San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi), 2007, pp. 51-52.

<sup>9</sup> L. Giussani, *Il miracolo dell’ospitalità* [*The Miracle of Hospitality*], Piemme, Casale Monferrato (Al), 2003, p. 12.

to think about our distraction, because it’s a betrayal to spend days, weeks, months ... what about last night: when did we think about Him? When did we think about Him seriously, with our heart, in this last month, in the last three months, from October until now? Never. We haven’t thought of Him as John and Andrew thought of Him while they watched Him speak. If we asked a lot of questions about Him [how often do we ask questions], it was out of curiosity, analysis, the need for analysis, for research, for clarification, for clarity. But that we think of Him the way one who is really in love thinks about his beloved (even in this case, it happens extremely rarely because everything is calculated to get something in return!), purely, in a way that’s absolutely totally detached, like a pure desire for good...<sup>10</sup>

When we touch with our hands a similar witness we really understand what we’re called to, what conversion is and what our distraction is, because unless One comes who has pity even on this betrayal of ours, on this distraction, and imposes Himself with powerful evidence and attractiveness, we won’t think of Him like John and Andrew did as they were listening to Him speak.

This is the truth. The truth isn’t something abstract—it’s this Love that bent down on our nothingness, even on our betrayal. But we, reducing the truth to some abstract knowledge, inevitably then reduce conversion to a moralism, to a thing that we have to generate, that we have to do ourselves. Instead, the truth is this being moved by our nothingness. Therefore, it is only if we let One enter who has bent down to us—it’s only due to being moved and provoked—that we can stop defending ourselves from belonging to Him, that is, to be available to this initiative. It’s what we should ask for because the origin of this initiative is a sympathy that He generates. Now look at what he says: “It’s as if even with this impetus of sympathy or credit—which is correct, fundamental, so that this second remark that I’m making on this inadequacy is a source of regret, but there’s no need to fear, because it’s the mark of a journey, it’s not an objection—we remained fundamentally inadequate to such sympathy. You can’t

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<sup>10</sup> L. Giussani, *Is it Possible to Live this Way?*, Vol. 3, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 2008-2009, p. 11.

bear it for long, you can't tolerate for long this inadequacy without working on it, because otherwise, even sympathy vanishes."<sup>11</sup> This initiative isn't an add-on, it's not something optional: without taking initiative, without responding to this initiative in the moment that this sympathy is reawakened, the sympathy vanishes! And he insists: "For this daily battle with the logic of power, for this daily victory over appearance and what is ephemeral in order to affirm this constitutive presence of things in their destiny which is Christ, what a personal movement is needed!"<sup>12</sup>

What personal movement! We're not here to be "all right," and that's it. We're together, friends, for this reason, in order to help each other, in order to sustain each other in front of this sympathy, in order to sustain each other in this personal movement; if not, we're not friends. You need this being moved that generates this personal movement and that finds this willingness in us. This is our responsibility: to convert our "I" to the present Event, that is, to this Love that bent down over me, that embraces me even in my betrayal. So, even for conversion, the rule that Fr. Giussani always taught us holds: "It's a passivity that constitutes my original activity, that of receiving, of acknowledging, of recognizing."<sup>13</sup> It is a matter of consciously welcoming the love of One who bent down on my nothingness and bends down now on my mood, on my betrayal, whatever the situation at which I have arrived and find myself in.

So then, you understand that to give in to this embrace, to give in to the Mystery's stooping over my nothingness is not so difficult. You don't need to defend yourself; instead, it's even difficult to resist. Like I wrote to a few of our friends who just went on a pilgrimage to Czestochowa: conversion is to try to respond to the preference that the Mystery has for us. And if we respond, if we help one another in this and sustain each other during these days, we can contribute to the renewal of the Church for the good of the world.

#### WITNESS

<sup>11</sup> L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987) [The I is Reborn in an Encounter]*, Bur, Milan, 2010, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>13</sup> L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1997, p. 101.

August 29, 2010, Sunday afternoon

MARTA CARTABIA\*

### 1. “A WORLD AFTER JESUS, WITHOUT JESUS”

Coming to live in the heart of New York—as happened to my family and me last year—is like entering that modern world after Christ, without Christ, as described by Péguy in the passage Fr. Carrón read to us at the Fraternity Exercises. Of course, the entire Western world is part of this description; however, whereas Europe still seems to be a battlefield for dismantling Christian civilization, which is still fighting, in New York this project seems to have been completed. They managed to do it, as Péguy says. I would even be tempted to add that they were very successful at it. I would like to start from this “they managed to do it,” because this is the impression one has when arriving in New York: you are amazed by the success of this project.

*They have succeeded:* New York is a wonderful city. Nature is beautiful, man’s work is wonderful, and everything works. One can hardly explain how millions of people of all races can live together, speaking over 60 languages. At this point I must confess that my whole family and I were immediately fascinated by this. As a guest of this city, living there for a year, I think that the secret of this success may be that all aspects of life are treated very professionally. The “Work God” gives its fruits, with the advantage that one can live well there by wasting less time in organizing one’s life. Everything is well taken care of. For example, in my personal experience, particularly in my first few months there I was very excited about everything because American universities are excellent. I was particularly impressed by all this space and attention given to the community dimension of life among faculty members and with students—which is almost absent in Italy. I thought that New York University, where I worked,

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was heaven: very high-level colleagues, very friendly, opportunities to share one's work, wonderful offices, works of art decorating walls, and classical music playing in the background all day long. Yet, as time went by, I would hear my colleagues more and more often complain about being somehow tired of it: "I miss home," they would say. "Here, I feel alone and miserable." Miserable. This is striking: not even New York is enough for man's heart.

*After Jesus, without Jesus:* Another fact one notices immediately when arriving in Manhattan is the clear separation between public and professional life on the one hand, and the religious dimension on the other.

This is a point we need to clarify, because American reality is complex. Actually, Americans are very religious, probably much more religious than we Europeans. There are also many "practicing Catholics." I have always been impressed, among many other examples, that the student Mass at my university on Sundays was crowded with several hundred young people. None of these young people, though, was visible during the normal academic life. The university is very attentive and open to student associations, especially religious associations; however, I never saw the presence of all those hundreds of Catholic students from the Sunday Mass that whole year—there was not once a public judgment, no sign to be recognized by the community.

"Without Christ," then, does not mean that religion is missing in people's lives. But from what I saw, it is an invisible and ineffectual religiosity.

One day, as I was reading for my work, I found this description by Ernest Fortin, which is particularly pertinent to this issue:

"Nietzsche has warned us a long time ago that *God's death* is perfectly compatible with '*bourgeois religiosity*' [...]. He did not think for a moment that religion was finished. What he questioned was whether religion can move a person and open up one's mind [...]. Religion has become a consumer's good, a form of entertainment

among others, a source of comfort for the weak [...] or an emotional service station, meant to satisfy certain irrational needs that it can address better than anything else. One-sided as it may sound, Nietzsche’s opinion is right on.”<sup>14</sup>

These words were clearly describing what was in front of my eyes, i.e., that a society without Christ is essentially a society that, without us realizing it, atrophies our relationship with Christ. It makes it mute and ineffective to our personal and social lives. This situation reduces Christ to moments of emotional or sentimental religiosity or, even worse, to set behaviors.

What is most surprising is that all this happens in the land of freedom of religion. On this issue, the American Constitution is a model for everybody, as the Pope has reminded us on several occasions. Nothing and nobody forbids public expressions of one’s beliefs—no law or regulation. It is not a persecution but, rather, a conformism that leads to this situation. Nobody forbids it, but nobody dares to live fully one’s religion so as to shape one’s whole life. Just like Solzhenitsyn said in his famous speech at Harvard in 1975: In totalitarian countries, there is no freedom; in Western countries, instead, there is maximum freedom. But by looking carefully, one can see that freedom always expresses “uniform trends, in the same direction (the one where the century’s wind is blowing), judgments maintained within certain limits accepted by everybody. It may also express common corporate interests which results in a kind of unification rather than competition.”<sup>15</sup> Western society is without Christ, not so much due to lack of formal, juridical, or political freedom, but due to a strange conformism that we live. Life is ruled by the domineering mentality of the milieu where we live.

## 2. POWER AND REDUCTION OF OUR HUMANITY

Facing this context, this summer I was deeply affected by reading the *Equipes* [texts from CL responsables meetings] collected in the

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<sup>14</sup> E.L. Fortin, “*The Regime of Separatism: Theoretical Considerations on the Separation of Church and State*,” in *Human Rights, Virtue, and the Common Good*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 1996 p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> A. I. Solzhenitsyn, *A World Split Apart*, Harper & Row, New York, 1978, p. 27.

volume *L'io rinasce in un incontro*<sup>16</sup> (*The I is Reborn in an Encounter*), because of Giussani's concern (recurring in all texts, above all starting from the text entitled *Chernobyl*) about how much our humanity is exposed to the venomous radiations of power and of the dominating mentality. Giussani saw in "power" or in the "dominating mentality"—the two terms are often used interchangeably—a serious and grave threat to our person, to our experience, and, more deeply, to our relationship with Christ: "Power cannot prevent the encounter to happen, but tries to prevent it from becoming history,"<sup>17</sup> i.e., power affects its lasting in time, its duration, our remaining.

In what way?

Here, I must say, I felt the strongest jolt because I discovered something very different from what I thought about this.

Let me try to explain: considering our general modern culture, the civilization after Christ, without Christ, in which we live and which hates Christianity so transparently, I and, I believe, many among us had in mind an image of power as of something outside of us that basically persecutes us. Maybe also because of the type of work I do, I have often thought that we are going through a period of battle. The popular "liberal" or "radical" mentality cannot understand us. Let us put it this way: I have always read this threat of power, hurriedly and superficially, as a persecution. I have often thought I belonged to something "different" from the rest of the world, and that's why I was attacked and, at times, also penalized. In our discussions, we have often repeated that we are irreducible to the logic of the common mentality and of the various cultural, intellectual, economic, and political powers that be. More simply, and maybe exaggerating a bit, I think that often we have understood our relationship with power to be this way: the world, society, politics are our enemies because they are the power and they want to destroy us.

This attitude is probably partially true. What I found more interesting, though, in *L'io rinasce in un incontro* is that here Giussani

<sup>16</sup> L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, [*The I is Reborn in an Encounter*], Bur, Milan, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

seems to be concerned mostly about something else. Giussani sees that power weakens our faith, by diminishing the humanity of each of us. He describes power as something that permeates us to the point that our desire is no longer worth our humanity. We start going after money, success, and power inside and outside the Movement. Like everybody else.

How?

Giussani says this very clearly: by reducing our desire. Power reduces desires by exploiting our natural tendency to “affective weakness” and “distraction.” And when desire is reduced, atrophied, put to sleep, we go after every *idol*.

All ages and all latitudes have their idols: work, career, affective success, political or any other kind of power. In one form or another, imperceptibly, a certain human position re-surfaces and dominates in us so *we consist in what we do*—and we are getting in our own way. This is the opposite of the You that dominates, as was mentioned in the last Fraternity Exercises: “This victory of power searches for its own space in our daily lives [...] by overpowering our fragility in front of daily reality. [...] So, please remember well that in our daily lives we either serve power or an Other with the capital ‘O,’ we either serve the power or the Mystery that works through our arms.”<sup>18</sup>

Hence, power attacks us, not so much (or only) because it tends to eliminate us from history (or, maybe this too), but above all because it assimilates us to itself.

This is why, as was mentioned in the introduction, we too can contribute to the development of this civilization after Christ, without Christ. We too, without realizing it, can find ourselves shaped by the same logic of power, even as we continue doing things of the Movement and of the Church. I am most struck by the fact that even our initiatives—which originally are genuine, by trying sincerely to respond to a need or, better, to Another Who calls us through reality—are always exposed to the risk of becoming our toy, our idol, what we rest our consistency on as persons.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

This is clear from the way we “manage” them. Our initiatives become activism, agitation, as if we were missing the awareness that there is Another who really operates in history. Ultimately, we measure our value, like everyone else, based on success; we give in to a bothersome self-complacency; we have a hard time tolerating correction; we become ideological and polemical. So our initiatives degenerate in factors of division among us and with the rest of the world, rather than an opportunity for witness and presence.

I think that Giussani wants to warn us about the fact that power is not just a risk for the “others.” Power attracts us, tremendously. We are really exposed to its seductions, and so we can easily become one among many factions: in politics, in academia, in economics, and so on—another one among many parties these days, one that is often defeated, by the way. So we lose our uniqueness.

We keep fighting against an enemy that we think is outside of us, whereas it has already won the siege and has taken our humanity.

While reading these *Equipies*, I think that the most delicate issue is that power seduces us, making us desire what it has to offer and making us doubt everything else. We are so caught up with ourselves, by the eternal problem of our personal affirmation, that we inevitably become a prey of power, and we act accordingly. Only one of these can dominate: either a You or the logic of power.

In some respects, this is neither something new, nor a reason for scandal. It is part of our human condition. What I think is more problematic is that perhaps we are not loyal enough to this tendency we have. We do not judge it, not recognizing it as something against our humanity. Maybe we are not aware enough of how much we are easily seduced by power. In fact, sometimes we think we are exempt from this temptation because of our encounter and the experience we belong to. In this sense, one is struck by how much in this book Giussani insists on one’s personal work (as we were reminded in the introduction to the Exercises), to the extent that he describes it with the image of a struggle, of a war, of a battle<sup>19</sup>: “For this daily struggle

<sup>19</sup> As when he describes the beautiful pages on Gideon, *Ibid.*, p. 274.

against the logic of power, for this daily victory over appearance and over the ephemeral, to affirm this constitutive presence of things in their destiny which is Christ, what a personal movement is necessary! It is a person's victory over the alienation of power. What a personal movement!”<sup>20</sup> This daily work to free our minds from the mentality of the power—he adds a little later—is an actual change of mentality, a *metànnoia*.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. “THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS”

I think that understanding on what level Fr. Giussani warns us about the influence of the dominating mentality and of power helps us—it helps me, for sure—to have a proper relationship with the world and reality. Here too I would like to relate one last thing that became clearer to me this past year in New York in connection with my job.

As I was saying, in the last few years I have often been involved in cultural battles and controversies. Almost always, being completely immersed in this logic of “cultural battles,” I have basically looked for allies among the people whose ideas were more similar to mine. Roughly speaking, I sought those who thought like me. In New York, this was not possible. Somewhat surprised and disconcerted, I soon had to realize that my working environment was more radically “liberal” than I was used to.

I found myself having to really face “the dominant culture,” and I could not do so by repeating a certain pattern of answers, even though they may have been correct. I had to work with others, discuss in workshops and seminars all the time, present on a regular basis the results of my research in public, listen to the criticisms and reactions of colleagues and students in a professional environment where I was surrounded by people better known and better equipped than me, almost all part of fashionable mainstream culture.

I had one thing to my advantage, only one big treasure: that way to look at man that we all learn from Giussani, from Carrón, by

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>21</sup> *cf.*, *Ibid.*, p. 273.

following the life of the Movement.

I tried to bring this into play in my work, both in relationships and in my specific research work.

When, at Easter, Carrón's letter about pedophilia was published in the Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica*, I understood what kind of cultural work I wanted to do. Before I even looked for the right answer to the problems I had to face, I wanted to understand more deeply the human need. What impressed me in that letter was that it did not disregard the need for justice (of the victims, of the guilty, of society). That letter did not diminish or underestimate it; rather, if possible, it magnified it, and brought it back to its original and true proportion. That letter was different from any other position because, before even looking for solutions, it dealt with the human question that the sad case of pedophilia had opened up. It was not defensive, but it was totally on man's side, yet it was bringing something new to a wounded humanity. It started from man, and thus from his need, his true need. If it was possible to do this work on the issue of pedophilia—which is absolutely the most embarrassing problem—then it was possible to do it on everything else. Giussani says that, in the encounter, “needs are interpreted in a new way, [...] thus overcoming society's undue influence, overcoming power's undue influence [...]. Man starts to see his needs according to the truth that he has encountered.”<sup>22</sup> That letter “refined” the human need for justice, and restored to it all its amplitude; it looked at humanity in its full depth. In that moment, I realized that we are different not so much because of the different solutions we may provide but, rather, because of our different, deeper, truer way of looking at human needs. I understood that all political and social claims, even when formulated in a confused, diminishing, and ultimately wrong way, can be a great opportunity for a cultural work—a work that cannot be limited to judging in terms of “right or wrong,” but that requires us to patiently stand in front of the question that those claims express. It requires for us to take seriously and thoroughly understand those requests, before we even start to

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363.

give solutions.

The “frontier” situation I found myself in also changed completely my work method. I immediately realized that polemical controversy would not get me anywhere. Neither would pure apologetics of a Catholic position. Remembering the great way of looking at man in the life of the Movement, I tried looking for its echo everywhere—in the authors I was reading and in the people I was talking to. What I found most fascinating was looking for reverberations of the truth in all authors of any ideology, and starting to build from there, seeking a language and arguments that would be understood also by non-Catholics. If I had just “attacked” by criticizing mainstream culture too quickly, like in a “heroic” controversy, I don’t think anyone would have even listened to me. I was surprised to realize that this secularized world may be a great opportunity, and that there is desire for truth in many people, beyond any ideological boundary. One of the most beautiful things I discovered this year is that one can start again with anybody, equipped only with our humanity, transformed by the encounter we have had.

I think the promise described by Giussani is really exciting: “That presence helps you find again the originality of your own life. And, paradoxically, you can find this originality [...] when you realize you have in yourself something that is in all men and that truly leads you to talk to anybody, and does not leave you a stranger to any man.”<sup>23</sup>

This does not imply that we stop judging certain attacks on humanity that come from the present mentality. But there are ways to do it that seem to follow the same logic of the “power” that one wants to oppose. That would make us a faction among others, against everybody, and probably a losing faction in this time of history. There is another way, though, the one emblematically documented in the letter about pedophilia previously mentioned. Compared to the powerful economic, political, mediatic means of mainstream mentality, this method does not seem to amount to much. Maybe on this road we will not be able to dominate history and politics in

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

the near future, but it leaves bricks with which to build something and it is able to move people. Carrón reminded us recently about Giussani's quote: "The forces that move history are the same that move man's heart."

This summer I reread a text that we used to read precisely at the same time as the *Equipos* we have been citing. This book is *The Power of the Powerless* by Vaclav Havel.

Some of you may remember the example of the fruit vendor who, one morning, decides to stop displaying in his store the signs with the propaganda slogans imposed by the regime. Why, Havel wonders, should the power fear so much such a banal gesture? It was a seemingly meaningless and ineffectual gesture. Housewives that go shopping, observes Havel, will sooner realize whether tomatoes or potatoes are missing, rather than the signs with the regime slogans. Yet, that fruit vendor and his family will be persecuted by the system because his gesture shatters the world of appearances of which ideology consists. The fruit vendor is a threat to power because by his gesture of truth he decides to get out of the world of appearances and lies, thus shedding light on all of the surrounding reality. This is why that gesture may have incalculable consequences, because it has a boundless potential of communication and dissemination, and it can affect an unpredictable number of people because—we would say—it corresponds to man's heart. As was said in the last few days, the game is played in the center of the "I," but it has a cosmic impact.

Where can we, then, see the victory of faith, we who live in this world after Christ, without Christ?

I believe all of us have this question inside and, as often happens, a few university students were the ones who formulated it most clearly. At the end of a conversation, one of them asked me, "What does it mean in this context that 'faith still has a possibility of success?' What kind of success can we ever attain?" And another: "In this present cultural climate, do we have to be satisfied with witnessing, or can we still pursue cultural and political battles?" These were illuminating questions for me that helped me understand what we mean by

the victory of faith in the world, as the Exercises of a few years ago discussed. After all, we have a similar idea to the one expressed in *Judas' Monologue*: “...but His reign was not coming.” Even here, Giussani gives a different interpretation: “Christians may not win. This is exactly the point: that we always win, even if we were to be always defeated, where ‘winning’ is realizing a greater humanity, and ‘being defeated’ means not having power. As one of you said once in a discussion: ‘We aim for a victory without power!’ This was what he meant. It’s the victory of the human. By facing life according to faith, we achieve a victory of the human, our gesture is more human. This does not mean that our position prevails politically, economically, and so on, that we attain power.”<sup>24</sup> God may even grant us results, but Christians may not win.

Personally, I understand that, for my life, this puts me in front of a continuous and ever new challenge: facing everything based on the logic of power (my plans, strategies, and alliances), or based on the recognition that Another operates in history, in my personal history as well as in the history of the world.

## WITNESSES

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402.

*August 29, 2010, Sunday night*

**LUIGI GIUSSANI, DENIS, ROSE BUSINGYE**

**LUIGI GIUSSANI.** My name is Luigi Giussani. You are probably asking yourselves why. It is because it's the name of the man who, with Fr. Carrón, has won over my darkness; my dark days have come to an end, and everything has been filled with light and gladness. I experienced a day darkened by death. My parents, my dad and my mom, died in a burning bus; they were running away from the rebels that had reached Kampala. I was with my uncle, who later died in an accident too—crushed by a press in a factory in Kampala. My world filled with darkness, and I thought I would be the next who would end up that way. I heard somebody mention the International Meeting Point, and I wondered if there could be the possibility for a new life for me. For me life had vanished, and I was just waiting to die; I thought that life could only be what I had seen and lived through. At the Meeting Point, I saw young people and old people together, and I was curious to see what they were doing. Somebody there looked at me and proposed that I go back to school; but I couldn't focus, because I kept hearing the screams and seeing the flames where my parents had died. Rose took me to School of Community, and the word that struck me the most was “value”—yet, I wondered what kind of value I could have, since both my parents and my uncle had died. What could give my parents back me?

I kept studying in the midst of these difficulties until 2007. That year, a man called Julián Carrón came to Uganda. I don't remember the day I was born, but I remember the day Julián arrived, because that is the day I was truly born. Carrón came to the Meeting Point and spoke with the patients and the children. I still recall that gaze, which penetrated my darkness. I followed his gaze as he talked: it was as if the darkness of death was getting smaller and smaller, and my heart was leaping in my chest. That night, I was unable to sleep. I went back home and then I went to school. Julián had mentioned that, the

next day, he would be at the St. Vincent School, for an assembly with all the people in the Movement. I didn't know anything about the Movement, but I went there because I wanted to see that gaze one more time. I followed that gaze, and it brought light into my life. I wanted to follow that man. I wanted to stay with him for the rest of my life. My heart was leaping in my chest so hard that I thought it would burst.

I went to see Rose again, because the only way for me to stay with that man was to be baptized. I thought Rose could baptize people, so I was a little disappointed when she didn't do it. She told me she would send me somewhere to prepare for Baptism. I went back to school and I realized that even my friends had the same desire; what happened to me had happened to them as well: our hearts burst out in songs. Every time we had catechism, we sang together. With all that cheerfulness going on we didn't spend much time studying catechism! We were baptized (12 men and 12 women) and I started my journey. Carrón's gaze took away my fear of death. We wanted our classmates to have the same experience, so we started teaching the catechism to the other students, and 38 of them were baptized, with the help of Mauro and Fr. Archetti. We wanted to communicate the beauty that we had met, the beauty of life that made us sing. We asked for help through our School of Community work—which we understood better when we sang. We formed “Carrón's Battalion,” and the Ugandan “Kireka's Alpini.” We sing the Alpini songs from the Italian Alps region. Some among us are the sons and daughters of soldiers, and come from various negative situations; yet those situations have been conquered by Carrón's gaze: we are now new men and women. We live to announce that it is possible to live this way.

**DENIS.** My name is Denis, I am almost 24 years old, and I am in my last year at the university, studying Statistics. I lost my mother when I was eight months old, and I lived with my father for ten years; then he died too and I grew up living with relatives and friends. They wanted me to go work as a housekeeper in their houses. My brother

and I thought that our lives had come to a dead end. We felt hopeless and couldn't see any future for ourselves. Then, somebody came to my house and chose me—that person was Rose. When she chose me, I had a different view of life: other people chose me and I was getting paid for the work I was doing. Rose asked me if I wanted to go to school, and I said, “Yes.” She asked me what I wanted to do, what I wanted to be, and why I wanted to attend school. I told her that I wanted to get a college degree and then a doctorate; I wanted to buy beautiful cars and be rich. She told me, “Look, you are infinite, and those things will not satisfy you.” I thought she was joking. I went ahead with my plan, I managed to get good grades, I attended college and got good grades there too, but I felt something was missing.

I had a few Protestant friends, so I tried to follow them and attend their church to fill that void, this void in me, but at their church I was told that I had to behave in order to go to heaven. Then, in 2007, Fr. Carrón came to Uganda, and he spoke with many young people and I was among them. He said many things, but two struck me: he said that Christ is everything, and that He is interesting for your life. What he said was like a new door opening in my life. It was news to my ears; nobody had ever told me such things. In that moment, I felt I wasn't an orphan anymore. My only desire was to unite my “yes” to Fr. Carrón's, because I felt drawn out of my nothingness into something that I didn't expect. I felt I gained the hundredfold, and more. My journey was not free of challenges—for example, at the university. My Statistics professor had written and read many books, and he knows that I am a Christian. He told me, “You are a Christian, and believe in Jesus Christ, whom you have never seen; Christianity is just a crutch for you. You Christians are like cripples; you need a cane, a crutch.” I answered: “Fine, maybe Christ is my cane; yet I am moving forward, while you, without a cane, are standing still. You are stuck.” He was a little annoyed and told me, “You are young and black; you are an African. How dare you talk like this?” I told him, “I am 23.” He said, “That's impossible.” I said again, “I am 23!” He got angry and left. The following day, he sent one of my fellow students, a very rich guy who owned beautiful cars, to tell me that

there was a job for me. It was a Statistics position in Dubai; they would have given me a good salary, seven virgins, and a good job. My schoolmate told me, “Listen to me, don’t let this job pass you by.” Yet, I was worried: “How can this happen? They want to give me virgins and money...” I didn’t understand what was happening and I wondered, “Why are they offering all this to me?” They made the same offer to other students, and they went. I refused to go and they said I was crazy. The following day, I was late for class, and the professor was already there. The students were silent. He stared at me and asked me to pick the most beautiful girl in our class. I told him, “They are all beautiful; I can’t pick one.” He said, “You clearly don’t know anything about women.” I answered, “I don’t need to choose.” My professor was a married man, he wore his ring, and I told him, “You, a married man, are making this proposal to me. Are you happy in your marriage?” I said this in front of the class, just like I am talking to you now. He said, “You have gone too far. You can’t ask me about my marriage,” and he dismissed us. He wasn’t happy with me and asked what I was made of, and said that he would tell the other professors that there was something wrong with me. I told him that there was nothing wrong, that I was just fine—or maybe I am not exactly human.

**ROSE BUSINGYE.** After Fr. Giussani’s death, it felt like my world had come to an end. When Carrón took his place, I didn’t have any problem with it, since I trusted Fr. Giussani and I obeyed. Yet, I considered him a substitute, the new boss. Nothing more. Then he came to Uganda, at the International Meeting Point, and he spoke to a crowd of patients and young men and women—at least 300 people. A few days after his talk, one of those young men, Luigi, came to see me, all sweaty, and told me, “You know, looking at that man I realized that I am not baptized.” I asked him, “When and how did you look at him?” Since I had known him for years, I thought, “He is African; he will get over it.” I told him, “Go, go; I’ll think about it and I’ll find somebody to prepare you for Baptism.” He left a little bit angry. The following day, another young man (who had walked all the way to my

office, without using mass transit, and who kept scratching himself the whole time he was here) came and said, “You know, that man, the one who came the other day... What’s his name?... You know, I need to be baptized.” I said to myself, “When Carrón spoke I was there, too, as well as all the adults of the Movement. What did he say that we didn’t hear?” I sent this second man away like Luigi: “Fine, I’ll think about it, go, go.” By the end of that week, five young men had come to ask me the same thing. Then, I gathered them in my office and I started questioning them: “Tell me a word, a phrase that struck you of what Fr. Carrón said.” None of them could tell me anything, but they all asked for the same thing. Then I asked a woman who was in Uganda: “Listen, give it a try. I know that they will all disappear in a week...” In the past, I had invited them to School of Community; they would come for a while and then they would disappear. I thought that the same thing would happen again. This woman started working with Mauro, and when they came home they were always enthusiastic about it. She told me, “I want to follow these young men; they are exceptional.” I went through the notes I had taken the day Carrón had spoken, but there was nothing about Baptism.

But while I was spending my time looking for quotes in my notes, those young men were already moving ahead. For example, one day, since we have been talking about charitable work for years, they decided to go to the quarry to sing Alpini songs for the women who work there. The women, with their mallets on their shoulders, were moved to tears. To a person who told them: “You have to translate these songs into English; you can’t sing songs that people can’t understand,” they answered: “How is this possible? You, an Italian, are telling us to translate the Alpini songs? When the Mystery talks to us, what language does He use?” While I was stuck looking for quotes, they had gone ahead. One of them, who had gone on Internet to look for information about the Movement, came to my office to read me what Fr. Giussani had said in 1980, or 1981, and I said to myself, “Fr. Giussani said those things in 1980, or in 1970, and I didn’t know anything about it.” At a certain point, I got really scared. I thought: “Darn! The world is moving forward and I, instead of moving, am

still stuck on quotes, phrases, and notes.” One day, Luigi came and said, “Rose, let’s go sing!” I answered, “No, I have a million things to do—I have this, I have that...” He remarked, “Rose, if life is only what you chose, you are on your own.” I was a little bit upset, but it was something that kept getting to me. At the end, I also met the priest who had given them the catechism test. He came back home and told me, “I will baptize them; I will follow them.” Twelve of them got baptized, and later on they even went into the schools to teach the catechism.

At a certain point, I said to myself, “Look, the world changes and I keep looking for what they saw in Carrón, what Carrón did... but the Mystery changes whoever He wants, whenever and through whomever He wants.” Then I said, “Now I will follow them too,” because it was so beautiful to see them sing. I decided that I didn’t want to be left behind. I started looking at Carrón, but looking where he was looking, not seeing him as the boss. He came back to Kampala and talked about the contemporaneity of Christ. When he arrived, I said, “I don’t want to be left behind anymore; the others are happy and joyful, and I am stuck looking for words.” I also went to hear him talk and, observing him, looking at what he was saying, looking where he was looking, I was changing. It was as if what he was talking about was becoming one with me; what he was looking at was becoming one with me, and this united me to him. Now, I don’t see him as the boss anymore, but as a companion on my journey. I don’t care about “Carrón as the boss” anymore. While those young men were looking where he was looking, I was focused on the boss, on the organization. Now my gaze is fixed where Carrón is looking, and while I fix my gaze there, focused on what he is looking at, I become one with what unites me to Carrón.

**LESSON JULIÁN CARRÓN**

August 30, 2010 Monday morning

## 1. THE DRAMA OF THE “I”

“It wasn’t for the thirty pieces of silver, but for the hope that He awakened in me that day.”<sup>25</sup> The real battle was introduced into history—was introduced in Judas’ heart as it is introduced in the heart of each of us—after Someone awakened that hope. Let’s not get confused: the problem is not the thirty pieces of silver; the nature of the struggle is “the hope He awakened in me.” Judas could be right there with the little group of disciples and not follow that initial attraction, and then his heart became like “stone.” It is deadly! Within, not outside. This struggle—we all know—is personal, but has a social and cosmic dimension as well, because we all know the consequences that originated from that “no,” from that heart of stone.

I am very happy about yesterday, because I think that we started to understand the true dimension of the word “conversion” that we mentioned the first day: it is not an interior affair. It does happen in the heart of the “I,” because there is no other drama except what happens in the “I”—the drama that each of us lives with the Mystery—but this personal event has a social, cultural, and cosmic repercussion, import, and we must not get confused about what the battle at play here is, today, as always. Many of you said it yesterday: I am thinking of Cristina, who has to make a choice in front of someone who proposes something to her, or of Rose, who has to take the initiative in front of what happened to her with her young men, or of Chris, who needs to open himself to that gaze that allows him to recover himself, or of what Marta witnessed to us, because the kind

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<sup>25</sup> C. Chieffo, “*Il monologo di Giuda*”[“Judas’ Monologue”], in Song Book, p. 220. (It was not for the thirty pieces of silver / but for the hope / that He awakened / in me that day. I was a quiet man, / I had a comfortable life, / I even used to pay my respects / to God in His house. / But one day that Man came, / He spoke of peace and love / He said that He was the Messiah, / my Savior. // Through lands dried up by the sun, / through the streets of every village / we were suffocated by the crowd / with their outstretched hands, / but then the days went by / and His kingdom did not come. / I had already given Him everything / and He betrayed me. // My heart became like stone / and my eyes became good at escaping. / He had given me anguish / and so He had to die. / Hanging from a tree is a body / that is no longer mine. / Now I see in His eyes / that He is the Son of God.)

of battle we are immersed in is against a power that wants to reduce the “I” and that hope that He awakened in us. The battle is between this hope that Christ, in His historical presence, awakened in us, and this power. We have to decide. Conversion is surrendering to this attraction, or our heart becomes made of stone. Marta reminded us well of this yesterday with that passage from Havel on the fruit seller: an almost trivial gesture, that could go unnoticed, but it is this gesture of one man’s freedom that threatens power. The battle is played out at this level, and carries, as everything does, a social import, because we cannot make a single decision that does not have a social repercussion. This is the battle we see in the Church; this is the battle we see in the world. It is not only in us or in the Church, though: we see it in many people we meet—let’s think of the Rimini Meeting—whose personal stories we know, and who are not even Christians; but in their hearts the same battle is taking place, due to that hope that Another has awakened in them through our simple presence.

## **2. “COMMUNION” AND “LIBERATION”**

To face this, to help each other to understand this, I want to start from two facts that happened this year during School of Community, facts that really made me think.

One day, a person gave this witness: “I will start with the premise that I lived these past years with great difficulty, due to a situation that developed at work which, after 30 years, made me decide to quit my job. Obviously, now I am also in the predicament of having to find a new job, which, in the current climate and with me getting close to 50, is not easy. However, my problem is not the circumstances, but how I lived them, because, during all this time, I sort of suffocated, and also lost some of the zest for life. In the Friday evening lesson at the Fraternity Exercises, on p.8, you said, ‘If there is no change in the way of perceiving, judging reality, it means that the root of the “I” has not been impacted by anything new, that the event of Christianity has remained outside the “I.”’ Last week, there was a meeting with Fr. Aldo; when he spoke of a dramatic situation he experienced, I felt a similarity with what I was living: I carried in me the scandal of this

lack of zest for life; even if I belong to the Movement, surrounded by the grace of many people who love me, I could neither forgive myself this scandal, nor confess it openly, fully, even to my dearest friends. At one point, Fr. Aldo said, ‘I changed when, after many years in which I was even asking to die, I started to look at myself not in the way I was looking at myself, but as God looks at me.’ I had already heard Fr. Aldo speak other times, also this year, but I always left the meeting saying, ‘He is a saint, and I am not.’ Instead, this time I left and I told myself, ‘If it is possible for him, why not for me?’ In fact, he really touched the core of my being, and I had the experience of being freed because he had turned me up side down, without destroying me, but only destroying my moralism and my being scandalized by my sin. This is so true that the next day, getting up in the morning, the first thing I said to my wife was: ‘Our relationship has to start all over, and we have to learn to look at each other the way God looks at us.’”

I was struck by this (I had already remarked on it at the time at School of Community), because we can stay for years in the Movement—like the person who gave the witness—without looking at ourselves as God looks at us, not even taking it into consideration; then we suffocate because our way of looking is like that of everybody else; it does not touch the core of the “I,” of our way of perceiving ourselves and the circumstances. On the contrary, we then complain that the core of the “I” does not change, that nothing changes, that we are suffocating in the circumstances! What freed him was that this time he was told what path to follow; Fr. Aldo communicated to him the hypothesis of a path, so that he might start to have the same experience Fr. Aldo was witnessing to him.

Two weeks later, at another meeting, another person gave a witness saying: “Since I am a bit slower, I am going back to the witness who, while going through a difficult period, met Fr. Aldo who told him: ‘Learn to look at yourself as God looks at you, not in the way you look at yourself.’ I have a problem with this. In fact, my wife always reproaches me that I have to pray more, that I have to think more, that I have to observe ‘silence’ more, but for me it is difficult to imagine how God looks at me. What does this mean: ‘...how God looks at

me’?” Then he quotes an interview in which Fr. Aldo said that what made Christ concrete for him was the way Fr. Giussani looked at him, kept him with himself, accompanied him: this is how Christ became a concrete presence. He added, “If I think of myself I realize that I do not grasp how God looks at me. I accept that God gave me this immense gift which is Fr. Giussani’s gaze that has been recognized as a charism. In a text from the *Equipe* [that I will bring up again later] Fr. Giussani says that the Movement is nothing, it is ephemeral without the Church, and that the Church is nothing without Christ: Christ is the center. However, without the Movement and without the Church I don’t know who Christ is. Why do I say this? Because this gift is called Communion and Liberation.” Then he goes on saying that in his small Fraternity group there is an ongoing complaint that they do not experience liberation. At that point, I started a dialogue with him: “In your opinion, why doesn’t this liberation happen?” He answered, “It is as if we stop at the remark that this liberation is taking a long time to come, without addressing the fact that it is ‘communion and liberation,’ meaning that the lack is in our capacity for communion, which is belonging. Fr. Giussani says, ‘When you discover this modality that takes hold of you, an affinity is born. To live is to follow this affinity, and this is the communion.’ It seems to me that often we linger on the complaint that we do not experience liberation, forgetting that the problem is the communion.”

The lack of liberation would then not be due to what Fr. Aldo and his “follower” said—the work of identifying myself with the way God looks at me after I have met this gaze—but rather to the lack of communion, not being part of a communion. I continued to press him: “And, according to you, why is this experience of communion missing? Aren’t all of you together in your Fraternity?” We could also ask: Aren’t we all together in the companionship, in the community? So: Why? Because this is the point: there is a way of living communion that does not lead to liberation! And this is a fact that we carry inside as an experience. He answered me: “The reason is that for us it is difficult for this belonging to become a real judgment.” I said, “Very well, this is the question. Why is this real judgment missing? Why isn’t

this real judgment affecting the ‘I?’” He answered, “In my opinion, it is because we are slow to recognize that everything is already given in the Movement.” I said, “But if everything is already given, nothing is missing. So, the question is: Why is this communion often not liberating us? I understand that we can stay together and continue to say that it is difficult to imagine how God looks at us, and it is true, it is difficult to imagine how God looks at me—but only before the encounter, only before you encountered Fr. Giussani’s gaze, only before this gaze came upon you. Before the encounter: yes; but after the encounter: no. That is, if we go back to the mere religious sense, to before the advent of Christ in our lives, then it is impossible to imagine how God looks at us. But Zacchaeus [I used this example, which later I found in what I will read from Fr. Giussani] understood how he was looked at; St. Paul understood how he was looked at; the sinful woman understood how she was looked at, and for this reason they belong to that place that is called communion. This generates the communion and generates the liberation. In fact, we can continue to talk about communion or spending time together, without having the real judgment—the gaze revealed in the encounter—affect our ‘I’ and our way of looking, and this can be recognized in the fact that the liberation doesn’t come. This is why it is not enough to spend time together to live the Christian communion; it is necessary that our being together is totally invested by the novelty of the encounter, that is, by the judgment, by the gaze that has come upon us, which is the reason why we belong to this community and this is a place of communion.”

Then I added a second point: “This being impacted is not mechanical. If every day each of us doesn’t allow himself to be struck, doesn’t recognize what he has encountered; if he doesn’t become his own (memory, this is called memory), that gaze disappears from his horizon, and, at a certain juncture, he comes to the point of saying that he doesn’t know how God looks at him. And in the moment in which I don’t know any longer how God looks at me, there is no more liberation. This can happen easily: we may live for years in this place, which we may continue to call communion, without the judgment

that generates the communion. This is why the witness who spoke at School of Community was struck by Fr. Aldo, because also Fr. Aldo was witnessing—as each of us can witness about himself—that for years he had lived his circumstances without looking at himself like God looks at him, and that the change happened when he accepted to start looking at himself as God looks at him, as he had been gazed at. He had been gazed at by Fr. Giussani—otherwise, the problem would not have surfaced. But Fr. Aldo’s step of awareness was that, at a certain point, he started to look at himself like God was looking at him, that is, in the way he had been looked at by Fr. Giussani. Then, if he was struck by Fr. Aldo it was because Fr. Aldo made him understand what he was missing and clarified for him the path to take. This is why he was liberated. Often we forget—as we said at the Fraternity Exercises—that anything (also this gaze, then) becomes mine only through my freedom. This judgment will become mine, this way of looking will become mine, if it passes through my freedom. There is no doubt that this freedom of mine is in permanent need of a place: we would not be able to stay with our freedom in front of this judgment in an individualistic way, without a place. It is necessary to remain in the place that generated this judgment, but without my freedom it doesn’t become mine. If one does not perceive as *his own* this need to return to this gaze that frees him when life presses on him, when he cannot stand himself, how will he be able to have an experience of liberation?”

Here we see an example of what I briefly referred to during the Fraternity Exercises: we continue to see as at odds the *event and communion* on one side and *work, initiative, and freedom* on the other; but in this way liberation will never happen, because it will not become mine. Please, do not mistake for moralism the fact that it passes through my freedom. Many times, in the moment in which we have to do something, we immediately label it moralism, and so we justify our laziness, our resistance to moving, to change. Then we end up with this deadly alternative: either it is automatic or it is moralistic; that is, freedom is gone. But do you think that to pray the *Angelus* or to let in this gaze is moralistic? No! It is called memory.

### 3. THE INSTANT BEFORE

To clarify this point, I decided to re-read with you the synthesis Fr. Giussani gave at a CLU *Equipe* in 1986, published in *L'io rinasce in un incontro* (1986-1987) [*The I is Reborn in an Encounter* (1986-1987)].

He starts by observing the moment the Movement is living at the time, noticing the difference between 1986 and what had happened in 1968: “First of all, then, the first valuable element to be noted is that, even if dreamy and confused, or surprised, our type of conscience is deeply rooted, inscribed in an appreciation of that event that we call the Movement. Do you remember when, this summer, we were talking of the ‘instant before’ that afterwards defines me in action? [Pay attention to the example...] For the boy, the young man, who has glimpsed the fascinating silhouette of a girl on the other side of the street or just ahead, there is an instant, before he dashes off in pursuit, in which he says: ‘How beautiful!’ That’s it—I am talking about that instant. However, we made a more serious comparison, that of Zacchaeus, before he got down from the tree and ran home. Last August, I tried to remind you to identify yourselves with that moment [before coming down from the sycamore] in which he felt himself gazed at and he felt as if he was enfolded in a new light, by a new awareness, an emotion that determined his entire horizon in a completely different way.”<sup>26</sup> The instant before: we cannot prevent this instant from happening; it is out of our control, thank God. So the decisive point is this instant before, this hope that not even Judas could avoid to see awakened in him. We need to notice that in that first instant—as we said at the Fraternity Exercises—knowledge and freedom come into play together. Our knowledge is not neutral; our knowledge always puts our freedom into play.

He continues: “When I speak of a prevailing esteem for the experience of the Movement, for this event that is the Movement, I am referring to something that evokes a disposition similar to that of Zacchaeus before he comes down from the tree; or of the boy before

<sup>26</sup> L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro* (1986-1987) [*The I is Reborn in an Encounter*], *Ibid.*, p.40.

he dashes off in pursuit of the girl. This is essential. I always say that our freedom comes into play in a fundamental choice more than in particular choices, because particular choices reveal a fundamental choice, the choice in front of reality as such: a choice of sympathy for reality, as nature drives us to make, for example, through the instinct of curiosity, the mechanism of curiosity; or the opposite—a defensive position in which we face reality with our elbow drawn over our eyes. In this world of deep light and shadow [at the core of the “I,” where the battle takes place], almost at the threshold of the subconscious, the entire position we are going to take toward God is decided; our position toward our father, our mother, our girlfriend, our children, our friends, the book, the events, the plants, the moon... toward everything. This disposition of sympathy and this response full of intelligent esteem—not yet manifest but at an intuitive level—toward the value that the Movement conveys and carries, toward what is present among us (what is present among us is truth), this premise or intuition or previous sympathy or this positive ‘instant before,’ is decisive.”<sup>27</sup> He adds something that may happen to anybody and so especially to us: “Too many great people who were in the Movement, and maybe still are, lack this. As long as this is lacking, the Movement is something pasted onto other things, a thing among others, as for the great majority of Christians lead by the ‘official leaders,’ that is, the clergy; Christ and the Church are a thing among others: very respectable, the most respectable, but still a thing among others. The whole question of the position of our faith can be brought back exactly to the breaking of this juxtaposition, because Christ, the Christian event, is ‘the’ life (as He Himself told us: ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life’), and so it enfolds and penetrates everything, it gives consistency, it establishes the consistency of everything. I believe—and I hope I am not naïve—that this moment has helped the majority of our communities to verify this esteem. The comparison you always have to keep in mind is that with Zacchaeus. This esteem for the Movement, that the Movement is true, that the

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

Movement is the true suggestion for our existence and for history, this initial sympathy or trustful esteem is essential.”<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. A MORAL DEFICIENCY: THE LACK OF MEMORY

After emphasizing this “before” in which, in that world of light and shadow at the threshold of the subconscious, all my freedom is already put into play, Fr. Giussani introduces the second factor: “Nevertheless, we remain seriously inadequate. It is as if, with this impetus of sympathy or esteem notwithstanding, an impetus that is right, fundamental (so this second note I am making, on this inadequacy, provokes regret, but it should not make you afraid, because it indicates that a journey is taking place; it is not an objection), we remained fundamentally inadequate to this sympathy. We cannot carry within us, tolerate, this inadequacy for too long without working on it—otherwise, even the sympathy vanishes.”<sup>29</sup> This is why to see this sympathy as opposed to working on it is nonsense. Without working on it, without surrendering to this sympathy, this sympathy simply vanishes and then the heart becomes made of stone. We can provide all the arguments we want to justify a heart made of stone, but it is not reasonable: whoever has lived the experience of this hope awakened in him will not be able to produce any reasonable objection to justify his heart made of stone.

What is the cause of this inadequacy? Fr. Giussani deals with it right after: “This inadequacy is due to a moral defect. I am using the word ‘moral’ or ‘morality’ in its deepest, essential sense which is the position of a person in front of Being, that is, in front of life, in front of existence as origin, consistency, destiny—let’s say destiny, which encompasses everything.”<sup>30</sup> It is not coherence with some rules, because this is moralism; morality is the position in front of Being. To have this sympathy in front of Being doesn’t require any special characteristic or energy of our will, something that makes one become a saint because he has this energy, while I, being a poor

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

wretch, don't have it. Morality is not this; it is not my capacity to be coherent with certain rules, but rather the position I have in front of the sun, my wife, the mountains, the gaze of Christ. Can anyone among us raise his hand and say that he is lacking something to be able to surrender to this gaze? Whatever the level of difficulty of the circumstance he is in at the moment, does he need some particular energy? He needs simply to surrender.

The text, which also quotes John Paul II,<sup>31</sup> continues: “There is a moral deficiency, a position, an attitude of the person that is not right yet, that is not positioned well in front of the great question that the Movement is conveying, as His Holiness was saying in his famous address on September 29th: ‘It is significant [...] how the Spirit, in order to continue with today’s man the dialogue started by God in Christ and continued during the entire Christian history, has raised many ecclesial movements in the contemporary Church.’ A movement is a concrete modality in which the dialogue initiated by Christ with man continues, in which therefore the presence of Christ becomes alive, operative, persuasive, educative, pedagogical, and constructive! It is a modality; it is called *charism!*”<sup>32</sup>

Then Fr. Giussani goes on to explain to us what this moral deficiency is, and it is a critical point: “Well, I would like to define this moral deficiency with a word, with a simple definition: it is the absence of memory. The difficulty is a difficulty of memory. Remember that memory is the content of the self-awareness of the Christian ‘I.’ What is the content of self-awareness? It is your ‘I,’ your *ego*: image, conception, consciousness of yourself, awareness of yourself. Naturally, the content of self-awareness is the ‘I.’ Now, memory is the content of the Christian person’s self-awareness. When St. Paul was saying, ‘It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me,’ he was giving the exact definition of the content of the new self-awareness.”<sup>33</sup> Stated with the words we have used: memory is the content of my gaze; that I have constantly as the content of my

<sup>31</sup> See the “Address to the Movement of ‘Communion and Liberation,’ on the 30th Anniversary of Its Foundation,” September 29, 1984, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987) [The I is Reborn in an Encounter]*, Ibid., pp.42-43.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

consciousness the gaze with which I have been looked at—as it was for Zacchaeus: his identity was self-awareness of that gaze.

Look at what a liberating thing he adds: “In any case, I said that this difficulty is not an objection, but it indicates a journey we will need to make.”<sup>34</sup> Instead, when we see this difficulty, we start to be alarmed, to be scandalized... The indication of a path is exactly what our friend who gave a witness during School of Community brought to our attention, referring to Fr. Aldo. He did not perceive it as an objection, he did not think he had been rebuked; he felt the tenderness of someone who tells you: “Look, if you do this, if you start to look at yourself as God looks at you, if you let in that gaze, you will start to see that life is something else.” This difficulty is not an objection, but the indication of a journey we will have to make, accompanying each other, in order not to end up giving credit to any idea but to that gaze (because we have emptied it of its meaning).

“Memory is a very concrete thing, as the Mass teaches us: ‘When Christ said, before dying, in that culminating moment, “Do this in memory of Me,”’ we have always commented, saying, ‘What does it mean “do this”? What is “this”?’ Everything! It is as if He had said, ‘Live in memory of Me; to live is the memory of Me.’”<sup>35</sup> Because one who felt himself looked at like Zacchaeus once did would like for this experience to continue forever! To be always under this gaze full of emotion, moved for me! This is why—my friends—to live is the memory of Him.

## 5. EXISTENTIALITY OF THE AWARENESS OF BELONGING

What does this lack of memory consist of? In order to help us, with the tenderness he always embraces us with, Fr. Giussani does not leave out anything: “So, I would like to make very clear what this lack of memory consists of, at least as an outline, hoping to go deeper into the topic at the Exercises, and especially trusting that you will delve into it more deeply during the work you will do this year. Years ago, I spoke of ‘the return of a bourgeois attitude.’ We called bourgeois attitude the

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

resistance we have in us to the fact that the purpose of my living ‘I,’ of my existence—and so the zest, the usefulness of my existence—is Another, is something other. We see a veiled analogy of this when we love: for a man who loves his wife, the zest for life is his wife and his children; the zest and usefulness of his existence is something other than himself. However, this is a veiled analogy, because what I am talking about is a hundred times more intense, actually, totally more intense, and that is like a sign. The bourgeois attitude is belonging to yourself, as I hope you read (if you haven’t done it yet, I hope you will feel the urgency of reading it) in *The Religious Awareness in Modern Man*, where at one point it is written that there is only one alternative: either man belongs to himself, claims to belong to himself, or he belongs to Another. In modern culture, man defines belonging as belonging to himself: ‘I belong to myself’ or, as the feminist slogans were saying during the demonstrations from 1970 to 1975: ‘I am mine!’ But it is impossible for man to belong to himself. In fact, as it is written in *The Religious Awareness in Modern Man*, it is inevitable that saying ‘I belong to myself’ coincides with ‘I belong to the power, to the force that is in power,’ so true it is that man belongs to Another!”<sup>36</sup>

We say: I am You. The battle, the alternative, lies in these two statements. I am challenging you: when were you more yourselves, if not in the moment when someone looked at you as Christ looked at Zacchaeus? It is a problem of knowledge, not a problem of moralism. It is a problem of knowledge: when have I been more myself? You can examine everything, scan your life; if you have a second of honesty, ask yourselves when you have been more yourselves: when you took care of your own business or when that unmistakable gaze introduced itself?

Here we can understand, as we heard yesterday from Marta, what influence the power has on us (it is peculiar that Giussani uses the same term Friedrich Nietzsche used: *bourgeois religiosity*). What effect has power on us? What influence? It atrophies our relationship with Christ, making it ineffective socially and in our personal lives.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

What brings us to this predicament is not persecution, but rather conformism. Nobody prohibits it, but nobody dares to live fully his religious dimension as the form for his entire life. We stay in society like everybody else. We detect the influence of power in the fact that we stop desiring to the extent that our humanity is capable, we reduce our desire for the infinite. It is not that we are not religious, that we do not make some particular religious gestures. Nietzsche never thought for a moment that religion had disappeared; when he was talking about God's death, he was objecting to religion's ability to move the person and open the mind, of making the "I" be reborn. So, we see that we belong to the power due to this reduction of the "I" that power achieves. We are content with a reduced way of being together, and often we don't even have an inkling that something is missing, so much has the power assimilated us, reducing us.

In fact, Fr. Giussani says, "What a personal movement is needed for this daily battle against the logic of power, for this daily victory over the appearance of things and the ephemeral, in order to affirm this constitutive presence of things in their destiny, which is Christ! It is the victory of the person over the alienation of power."<sup>37</sup> He continues: "A change is needed. This change is 'the' work of everyday."<sup>38</sup> Exactly what the Pope calls "conversion;" that is, to free oneself from the mental schemes of power, to change our mentality: "The change of self, as a change of mentality (*metánoia*) and a change of affection.... It is work."<sup>39</sup>

So, we can start to understand what this moral deficiency we have consists of: "First of all, it is an absence of existentiality in the awareness of belonging [every word in this sentence is crucial: an absence of existential depth—in the awareness of belonging]. It means that [even if we are here] our sense of belonging to Christ is not strong. But Christ is in the mystery of the Church, and the mystery of the Church reaches us persuasively, pedagogically, constructively, through the Movement [which is the ultimate terminal of how the

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>39</sup> L. Giussani, *Dal temperamento un metodo*, [From Temperament, a Method], BUR, Milan, 2002, p. 331.

Church touches us]. Then, the problem is our belonging to this super-ephemeral thing that is the Movement, our companionship: it is not our companionship that has value, it is the mystery of the Church that has value; and the mystery of the Church is almost something ridiculous as such, because it is Christ who has value. However, if we skip one passage [the Movement], we censor Christ and we make our own image prevail, that is, ourselves once again [and so we forget how we have been looked at]. There is an absence or, better, a great weakness in the existential dimension of our awareness of belonging, of the consciousness of belonging [this is what we have to understand, and Fr. Giussani helps us to understand]. When each of us says: ‘I’ [each of us can compare himself with this], it doesn’t even appear at the corner of our eye, at the farthest edge [of our conscience], the strength of our belonging to something other [as if Zacchaeus said: “I,” without having that gaze which surprised him at the top of the sycamore appear at the corner of his eye, at the farthest edge], whose physical, ephemeral sign is our companionship, whose historical sign is the Church, whose reality is Christ! Now, the awareness of belonging to You, oh Christ, the awareness that I belong to Your body which is the Church, the awareness that I belong to this grace of Yours [which is more valuable than life], which is this companionship... this awareness of belonging coincides with the supreme moral concept of Christianity, which is called ‘conversion.’”<sup>40</sup>

It is impressive how relevant these words are. Many years have gone by, and yet none of us would be able to tell us better what we are lacking—that this defect of memory is a defect of awareness, of knowledge. Fr. Giussani gives some examples to explain this: “A child who is there alone looks around, all afraid, and whimpers or even cries loudly or screams but, as soon as he hears the voice of his mother (or his father) he runs to her, he is converted, *convertit*, he ‘turns toward’ her,”<sup>41</sup> and in that moment it is as if his cry was embraced. His crying is exactly what puts him in relationship with

<sup>40</sup> L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro* (1986-1987) [*The I is Reborn in an Encounter*], *Ibid.*, p. 45-46.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

his mother. We think that any of our wounds is an obstacle; instead, for the child, it becomes immediately the occasion to experience the company that makes him happy, verifying what good his mother is for him. It is not something abstract; it is a presence that, entering the horizon of the child, converts him: liberation occurs.

“Similarly, conversion is the acknowledgement that ‘I am You,’ that I belong to You, I belong to this reality in which You are present, that exists because You *are* [this is a Christian companionship not reduced, the only companionship that can liberate us!]. So, conversion is precisely this awareness of belonging, precisely this belonging to our companionship—notwithstanding all its fragility, its contingent and ephemeral aspect—as the place [*place*, not *substitute*, *place*!] of our relationship with Christ and with the world through Christ. Everything else stems from this: all the behavior toward things, people, ourselves; all relationships are generated by this subject. Look—I see one of you who is inspiring me to make this comparison—I may have done all sorts of bad things, but if now, “now”—because what is essential in life, as I hope you will study in *The Religious Sense*, is the present; all the rest is nothing, the now “is,” *nunc*—if now in the relationship with myself, with you, with the world, in the circumstance, in a group of people who are having a discussion, with your friends in school, with your teacher, facing a serious temptation (for example, let’s say it openly, of stealing, or something else), if now I say, “No, it is not right, because I am a Christian,” this witness given in the present, this choosing a side in the present (as one of you was saying, you say to your friends: “I am a Christian,” or you do not say it with words, but in practice: “I am a Christian”) is the gesture of belonging. This is the awareness of belonging in action, in its existential dimension; this is the existential dimension of memory.”<sup>42</sup> My friends, it is not automatic—it is choosing a side, it is a decision of freedom (and we could be here without our being together becoming a challenge to do this): to recognize to Whom I belong now. But we can re-read these pages—it is terrible!—with a modality that is already reduced,

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46-47.

speaking of the companionship mechanically, as if we could be spared this existential dimension of memory, as if I could be spared this struggle, this personal move. This is the influence of power that paralyzes me, that atrophies my “I.”

I can stay in the companionship (or in the Fraternity, or in the *Memores* house, or in the community) doing nothing, seeing the fact of staying in the companionship as opposed to the work to be done, as if I were already fine, and this does not liberate me. Or, through my free initiative, I can recapture existentially the awareness I received in the encounter. It is not that I have to generate on my own, or that I have to imagine the gaze that reached me, no! The gaze I felt upon me in this companionship happens again, now, in the present. However, it is necessary that I convert to the content of memory; that memory become existentially present now. This is the work that needs to be done. It is called memory, and it is the origin of liberation: “This fundamental morality liberates you, makes you free, free from the judgment of your ability (‘But what will I do tomorrow? I am not capable!’). Saying, ‘I will be what I will be, but I belong to Christ, I belong to this reality that is the Church, to this reality that is my companionship; I belong to this companionship because it is Christ’s instrument,’ makes you free. This fundamental image of morality as belonging acknowledged in the present instant, as choice of side in the present moment, frees you from the analytical exercise of judging whether you are capable or not: ‘I say I belong to this reality; we will see if I am capable or not.’ This frees you also from the judgment of being inconsistent: ‘I have been inconsistent up to a second ago.’ It liberates you from the judgment of your ability and it liberates you from the judgment of your consistency because it is in this belonging that your inconsistency finds the possibility of being corrected in the future, of being diminished, and your inability may become ability for the future.”<sup>43</sup>

#### **6. TRUE COMPANIONSHIP: CHRIST CONTEMPORANEOUS WITH US**

What pulls us out of this bourgeois attitude, this conformism,

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

this reduction of the “I,” helping us to overcome the resistance to belonging to Another, that is, to convert? Not the texts of the Bible or of the charism, not a memory of what we lived in the past, not a Christianity reduced to rules—all of this is not able to make present that attractiveness that allows us to change; it is not able to awaken the awareness of belonging which is what liberation consists of. Here, we face the true challenge that helps us to recognize what true companionship is. In fact, what is at stake is to understand what the true nature of companionship, the true nature of communion, of our being together, is. Not any companionship is true, but that companionship that makes Christ’s gaze be present to me. This is why it is not enough to read the texts of the past. Even to read the texts of the past like the Bible, tradition is necessary, because tradition is the beginning happening again. A discourse is not enough, which is why the texts alone are not enough; the memory alone is not enough, it is not enough to say that somebody said it to me, or that “Fr. Giussani said it to me.” It is not enough! I am sorry, but it is not enough! And we know very well that it is not enough: we live for something happening now, because only something present now is able to re-awaken the “I,” and this is called “testimony.” We are here because we met someone who made the gaze of Christ present for us, and this made us understand what happened to Zacchaeus. This is the value of the testimony. To witness is to make this gaze present, as Fr. Aldo was able to do for that person.

The true nature of communion is that through a judgment, through a testimony, I regain that gaze in the present and I am freed from its reduction—through the testimony I experience the contemporaneity of Christ. If the same experience Zacchaeus had could not happen today, obviously according to a different “how,” if we couldn’t meet Giussani in a different way today, why would we be interested in Giussani? By means of this communion we experience the contemporaneity of Christ, we continue to have the same experience we had with Fr. Giussani. Christ makes Himself present now, and I know that He is making Himself present now because He frees me from my reduction, from my sorrow: I experience Him

present. If Christ doesn't remain as present as at the beginning—as Fr. Giussani always taught us—we find ourselves alone with the texts of the Bible and our myriad interpretations, as happens for the Protestants, until we get bored.

But again, in front of this presence of Christ now, the problem existing at the beginning is re-proposed, the problem of knowledge and freedom which come into play at the same time. How can I know that He remains, that the charism remains? Look at what Fr. Giussani says: “*Operatio sequitur esse*, the philosophers say (not the men of letters, who do not understand anything, but the philosophers!); *operatio sequitur esse*: one experiences the presence of a living being from the content, the fruit of his work, from his work. His Presence is made visible, tangible, and it can be experienced, from the fact that it changes the life of the people who are part of the community, of the companionship. This is why the keenness with which we perceive the testimony of this and that person—not necessarily the leaders—the keenness with which we perceive the testimony, even cautious, even very discreet, present in the people of the community, is the greatest sign of that honesty we mentioned earlier. On the contrary, there is no stronger sign of dishonesty than to note first of all the flaws inside the companionship. *Similes cum similibus facillime congregatur*. One perceives what is similar to himself. If evil is predominant in you, you will complain about evil; if the search for truth is predominant in you, you will discover truth.”<sup>44</sup> How simple, keen, attentive, available we need to be in order to catch Him at work! It doesn't mean that the flaws are not there, but what kind of discovery is it to realize that they are there? We are not here because we are perfect. The only novelty here is someone who witnesses that He is present, because this is the hope also for my flaws.

So, when you tell me that you do not see Him, you are not lying, but you are not seeing Him because evil prevails in you—so much freedom is played out in knowledge. A person can tell me, “I do not see Him,” and I can answer, “You are perfectly right: you do not see

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<sup>44</sup> L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)* [*Men without a Homeland*], BUR, Milan, 2008, pp. 276-277.

Him.” Wasn’t Jesus performing miracles? And yet some did not see Him. Do you realize what drama, what fierce battle is taking place? The problem is not with “Carrón” who is the leader—the battle is not with me, don’t get confused, I am not part of it. The struggle is with what God does through reality and the witnesses. This battle is everywhere, now, in the Movement. We see happening now the same battle the Gospel of St. John describes: “Do not believe Me, then, if I am not doing the things my Father wants Me to do. But if I do them, even though you do not believe Me, you should at least believe my deeds in order that you may know once and for all that the Father is in Me and that I am in the Father.”<sup>45</sup>

This is why if the beginning—the gaze of Christ through a true companionship—does not happen again, and if we do not recognize Him (because it may happen that we do not recognize Him), we succumb to living the companionship in a mechanical way. If the memory, the awareness of belonging to Christ, does not become existential, we live the companionship mechanically. We do not deny it, we do not deny that we belong to it, but we take it for granted, and so we empty it, thinking that it will happen mechanically.

Moreover, it is striking to see how historically, in the development of our companionship, after less than a decade from 1986, Fr. Giussani had to go back to this topic to dramatically correct the Movement, since that way of living the companionship was becoming a utopia. What does this mean: “companionship as utopia”? “To think of the companionship as the place that mechanically guarantees you the zest for life,”<sup>46</sup> guarantees you the liberation with no need of your conversion, without you having to live memory. He continues: “First of all, this is [totally] naive! It does not take into consideration how precarious and short-lived the companionship is. Moreover, human relationships give true security and zest only when they are the outcome of a dramatic tension in which man’s intelligence and freedom are involved.” What makes us realize that the companionship

<sup>45</sup> Jn 10:37-38.

<sup>46</sup> L. Giussani, *Un caffè in compagnia. Conversazioni sul presente e sul destino* [*A Coffee Together. Conversations on the Present and on Destiny*], edited by R. Farina, Rizzoli, Milan, 2004, p. 129.

has become a utopia? “The fact that a person puts his hope in the automatism of this phenomenon”: I am at home, I am in the Fraternity, I am fine... nonsense! We have verified that this is not enough, because it does not bring liberation. Pay attention, because I know my chickens: it is not that saying this now Giussani wants to get rid of the companionship. Absolutely not! It is a certain kind of companionship that is under scrutiny. He says, “Ultimately, a certain kind of companionship simply evades responsibility [that is, we are true company for each other if it re-awakens our responsibility, not if it makes us escape our responsibility]. In this way, we escape from the seriousness, the creativity, the fruitfulness of life and the tension to the ideal which define the human heart [we reduce the heart; this is the influence of power that reduces the human heart]. In the end, the mechanical approach I spoke of earlier [look at how he defines it] is the fundamental immorality Eliot described, that makes us seek salvation in an image of companionship: ‘They constantly try to escape / From the darkness outside and within / By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.’”<sup>47</sup> Everything is organized perfectly; we have everything, even the companionship, so we do not need to change anything; no one needs to convert. But this—he says—is the “fundamental immorality.” “What a misery our companionship would be if it were defined by an alienated act, by relationships that are mechanical and automatic! [...] The Christian companionship is the outcome of the true dimension of a new type of man: the man born from the encounter with Christ, as St. Paul says, speaking of a ‘new creature.’ If by *dimension* we mean the way of looking at reality originating from man’s self-awareness, then the companionship has a role in the definition of the ‘I,’ specifically as measure of reality as discovered by the new heart. It is not about being alone or part of a group.”<sup>48</sup> This is the awareness that defines the “I.”

## 7. THE DESIRE TO CHANGE

Now we understand what Giussani was for us, how he fought

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

against all these reductions, and how he witnessed to us Christ present—in such a persuasive way, with such an intensity that made us come out of that reduction of living the companionship as utopia. He denounced it out of charity for us, out of tenderness for us. However, not even the memory of Fr. Giussani is enough, not even having heard him speak, not even reading his books and succumbing to analytical interpretations. Only the contemporaneity of Christ—now as then—may move us to the point of changing. Fr. Giussani used to say that the Gospels were not enough—imagine how his books could never suffice! He continues: “When this happens, it is not a Christian companionship.... There are two options: either there is a teacher, a leader whom we follow and who educates to this consciousness, or everything falls apart, everything gets divided and the companionship fosters only the formation of small useless groups.” A leader is fine, but what kind of leader? “An educator,” he says curtly, and then explains: “A man who has lived and lives the companionship according to what we said until now cannot help but show others how it is born within himself. Haven’t we always defined education as the communication of self?”<sup>49</sup> Let’s hope that God may always give us someone who educates us to this; otherwise, everything will fall apart.

This contemporaneity of Christ now, through all the things that happen and we are seeing among us, is what confirms the truth of the charism. Fr. Giussani remains present not only because we remember him, but exactly as the contemporaneity of Christ in the Church confirms the truth of Christ. However, Fr. Giussani offers to us also the sign of the authenticity of our belonging to the companionship and of the fact that this companionship is authentic. What is the sign? If it awakens in us the desire to change—that is, if it does exactly the opposite of what the power does (to make us become mechanical, automatic): “Look, one cannot say ‘I belong to Christ, I belong to this companionship because it is the instrument of Christ;’ one cannot recognize this belonging as his own substance, without this implicating somehow the dawning of a desire and a will to change [the word

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

*change* implies the entire human existence]. Nothing exists, if not as movement: the word *change* implies the entire human existence; one exists as a human being only if he changes!”<sup>50</sup> Let’s be honest with ourselves: when did we last surprise in ourselves this desire to change (because we cannot stay in a place that is true without having this desire surfacing)? Sure, I can block this desire as soon as it forms, but in facing the attraction of beauty I cannot stop it from rising up, together with the desire to adhere.

Without the contemporaneity of Christ, there is no hope that can sustain life: “Hope has to rest on a fact that is present. What is this fact that is present that may be the criterion for judgment and the source of security? It is Christ, Christ our hope—that is, present—which is the Church, which is our companionship, since it is our way to be part of the Church, and it is the sign of the presence of Christ. This is the fact that allows us to face everything, to judge and face everything.”<sup>51</sup>

What is the dynamic of this belonging that is our hope? The fact that we were chosen. We must accept that we were chosen. This is our esteem for the One to Whom we belong. And the more we accept, the more the desire, the asking, the begging emerge. Esteem and begging; morality and memory; desire and asking.

Fr. Giussani concludes—and with this I conclude as well—by giving two operative directives to deepen the existentiality of the awareness of belonging.

The first directive is the battle for the esteem, that he divides into three parts: “The battle for the esteem is realized first of all with the asking, the begging for this belonging to Christ: it is called ‘prayer.’ If prayer is not asking, it is either something intellectual or sentimental. Prayer is asking to belong to Him through the historical instrument in which He encountered us [...]. Second: meditation. [...] After being struck by the encounter with Christ, Zacchaeus—while at home with his wife, with his children, while ‘negotiating’ the taxes as he had always done, because it was his livelihood—compared constantly what he was doing with that face that was looking at him, with that

<sup>50</sup> L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987) [The I is Reborn in an Encounter]*, Ibid., p. 47-48.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

new horizon of light that had arisen in him. This is meditation. [...] Third: training to not be afraid of sacrifice. Because, my friends, if I value what I belong to, if I belong, it means that I have to relinquish myself in some way: ‘Whoever loses himself, finds himself;’ ‘Whoever loses himself for Me, finds himself,’ says Jesus.”<sup>52</sup>

The second directive coincides with judging: “This is crucial. At the end of one of his novels, Paul Bourget, a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century author, wrote: ‘Either man acts according to how he thinks, or he ends up thinking the way he acts.’ So, in the end, [...] the problem is judgment, exercising judgment,”<sup>53</sup> that is, a complete experience, a total verification.

If we do accept to convert, we may become a good for others, for the Church and for society. At this moment in time in which they are trying to build a world without Jesus—but they are not entirely successful, because there is always a crack which shows that the attempt does not hold—humanity is in need, in its immense mortal weakness, and is waiting for a testimony from us. To the degree that we take upon ourselves the difference of Christ’s gaze and we live a more fulfilled humanity, we can respond to this cry of humanity and of today’s world. In fact, this grace was given to us for the sake of all.

### SYNTHESIS JULIÁN CARRÓN

*September 1, 2010, Wednesday morning*

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

The songs we sang describe our drama better than anything else. “When he was getting up in the morning, everything annoyed him, starting with the light; even the milk in his coffee.”<sup>54</sup> We may have had the Christian encounter, we may have lived a passionate experience, like that with Fr. Giussani, and yet we can still get up in the morning annoyed by everything: “The Lord was sending him many gifts from heaven, but he was barely looking at them; rather, at times he was complaining about them.”<sup>55</sup> Even in us, now, complaining can prevail as the ultimate perception we have of life and of ourselves. Only if we look at our humanity without fear, at our human experience as it is, can we be moved, as the song *I Wonder* says: “I wonder as I wander out under the sky”—in the situation we described, I can experience all the wonder “that Jesus the Savior should come for to die, for poor lowly people like you and like I.”<sup>56</sup> The annoyance you feel and your inability to get out of it by yourself can make you understand better than anything else how relevant it is to you now. We are given this annoyance and this complaint as the opportunity for each of us to understand who Christ is, because “we do not know who He was”: if He does not happen again now, we do not know who Jesus is now. But when we start to wonder who we are and who is giving life to

<sup>54</sup> C. Chieffo, “*Luomo cattivo*” [“*The Bad Man*”], in *Il libro dei Canti*, Jaca Book, Milan, 1976.

(Unofficial translation: He was a bad man, / a very, very, very bad man, / and yet, even though he was so bad / the Lord saved him. // When he was getting up in the morning, / everything annoyed him, / starting with the light; / even the milk in his coffee. // But one day he wondered who was / giving him life, / one day he wondered who was giving him love. / “Who cares about life, / who cares about love?” / He kept repeating these things, / but his heart was hurting. // And the Lord was sending him many gifts from heaven, / but he was barely looking at them; / rather, at times he was complaining about them. / But one day... // Then one day he saw a child / who was smiling at him, / he saw the color of the grapes / and his grandmother who was praying. // And he realized that he was bad / and all dirty and black; / he put a hand on his heart / and cried almost for a whole day. / And God saw him and smiled; / He took his sorrow away, / then gave him even more life, / then gave him even more love. // He was a bad man, / a very, very, very, bad man, / and yet, even though he was so bad, / the Lord saved him. )

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> “*I Wonder as I Wander*” in *Song Book*, p. 60. (I wonder as I wander / Out under the sky, / That Jesus the Saviour / Should come for to die, / For poor lowly people / Like you and like I, / I wonder as I wander / Out under the sky. // When Mary bore Jesus / ‘Twas in a cow stall, / With wise men and farmers / And shepherds and all / And high from God’s heaven / A star’s light did fall / And the promise of ages, / It did them recall. / If Jesus had wanted / For any wee thing, / A star in the sky or / A bird on the wing, / Or all of God’s angels / In heaven for to sing / He surely could’ve had it, / ‘Cause he is the King.)

us—when we become aware of ourselves—then we start to realize what is happening: “He saw the color of the grapes” and “a child who was smiling at him.” Then, “he put his hand on his heart and cried almost for a whole day.” This is what makes it possible for the Lord to give us everything: “And God saw him and smiled; He took his sorrow away, then gave him [the gift of] even more life, of even more love.”<sup>57</sup>

How is this drama played out today? What are the characteristics of this struggle? Fr. Giussani tells us: “We cannot file reality away thinking that we already know everything, that we already have everything. We do have everything, but we come to understand what this ‘everything’ is in the clash, or better, in the encounter with circumstances, people, and events. As I said before, we must not file away anything, nor censor, nor forget, nor renounce anything. We understand what this everything that we have, this truth we have, that we carry within us, means [...], what this “everything” means, when we judge, face things, that is, through the fact of encounters and events; through the encounter—meaning relationships with people—and in events.”<sup>58</sup> In the encounter with Christ, therefore, we have received everything. St. Paul reminds us of it with these words that erase any doubt: “The testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift.”<sup>59</sup> He says this to a small group of the first Christians in Corinth. They are not lacking any gift: they have received everything. But this does not mean that we are spared reality, as we can see based on all the challenges that we are called to face. This is the significance of the sentence of Fr. Giussani that we quoted last year and that now we can grasp much better: “The circumstances through which God has us pass are an essential and not secondary factor of our vocation, of the mission to which He calls us [circumstances are decisive because they call us to take a stand]. If Christianity is the announcement of the fact that the Mystery has become flesh in a man, the circumstance in which one

<sup>57</sup> C. Chieffo, “*L'uomo cattivo*” [“*The Bad Man*”].

<sup>58</sup> L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [*The I is Reborn in an Encounter*], *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>59</sup> 1 Cor 1:6-7.

takes a position about this in front of the whole world is important for the very definition of witness,<sup>60</sup> that is, of our contribution to the world in this situation, in this circumstance in history. How did reality challenge us this year? It is not very hard to see that the greatest challenge the Church had to face was the problem of pedophilia. We have seen how the Pope faced it (not even he is spared reality and the evil that arises in it). On the other hand, we have seen the difficulty we have in understanding the relationship between belonging and work, communion and the tension of freedom to recognize it, communion and work. All the difficulties, the circumstances, the objections, and the questions that may happen on our journey are a precious opportunity, because they provoke us and re-awaken ever more forcefully the question: How do we respond to all of this? What is conversion? What is communion? Where can we discover today how God is looking at me?

The starting point, then, is to accept the challenge posed by reality. Facing the problem of pedophilia, the Pope could have looked the other way. Similarly, I could have looked the other way, saving myself some effort, in front of the question on communion and work, just like we all can look the other way. But this is not in my DNA make-up. We make a choice based on a judgment of reality, because reality is the modality through which the Mystery calls me to answer. If we look the other way, even with all of our perfectly correct discourses, we erase the Mystery from history and we reduce the provocation of reality just to organizational issues. Many people have thought of resolving the problem of pedophilia by reducing it to organizational issues, without accepting the challenge given by the Pope, when he said that it is the greatest call to conversion made to us by the Mystery. For this reason, my friends, the wound that is provoked in us by these things and the questions that they raise are decisive in order to read Fr. Giussani and understand his charism now. If I had not come to terms with the issues and the questions that are open in the present, through the journey of this year, I swear to you that I

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<sup>60</sup> L. Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino. In cammino [Man and His Destiny. On a Journey]*, Marietti, Genoa, 1999, p. 63.

would not have read Fr. Giussani with the same attention (as it was seen in the Lesson). We received everything in the charism, but we understand this “everything” in the impact with life’s challenges, with the circumstances. And I am grateful for not being spared anything, because without this, I would not understand Fr. Giussani and I would not understand what Christ is. You do as you like.

For this reason, the first choice is already critical: either to accept or to erase the call the Mystery makes through reality, which takes the form of problems, issues, objections, questions. What makes me understand is neither a vision nor a revelation, but it is—first point—allowing myself to be wounded by reality as it happens, which sets me in motion as I speak to you, which makes me more attentive to what you say and to what I read. Like it happened during these days: without your contributions, your words, your witnesses, without your reactions, I would not have been able to read Fr. Giussani with the same understanding expressed in the Lesson. This is why it is not a vision, but a belonging to this place, with the tension to learn and understand what Fr. Giussani witnessed to us.

So, what kind of experience did we have together? Let’s try to look at it, because it is only in experience that all the factors at play are revealed. I think that everybody agrees that during these days we participated in an event that made us understand better what we have received from Fr. Giussani, what its significance is, and not because we analyzed the text more deeply or discussed the interpretations. All of this could not have given us the understanding we have seen happening.

Where did we start from? We started from a fact, an observation: there is a way of being together that is not Christian communion. And what is the clearest indication of this? That it does not liberate us, that there is no liberation; that is, it is not Communion and Liberation. Fr. Giussani told us that this happens due to a lack of memory, due to a lack of existential depth in the awareness of belonging. This indicates to us what kind of tension we must live when we are together in order to experience liberation: “The question is not just to be united,

but our freedom at play in this unity,”<sup>61</sup> the vibration with which our freedom is played out. This tension is not an effort of the will that seeks to create liberation with its own energy—all of our attempts are inadequate, so much so that liberation does not arrive—but it is meant to be striving to recognize the presence of Christ. When St. Paul says, “Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me,”<sup>62</sup> he defines exactly the content of the new self-awareness. Without this new awareness, there is no Christian communion, because we are not letting into our life the gaze that made us become part of this communion.

What is the experience we often had with Fr. Giussani? I am referring to those who had the privilege to know him personally and spend time with him. He witnessed to us a way of being together with this inner tension: it could have been while having lunch together, or during a particular gesture, or while joking, but it was impossible to be with him without being challenged, displaced. Why? Because of the tension with which he was living, because he was totally determined by that Presence that constituted him, that had taken over his whole life, that was dominating him since he was a young priest, as we saw in the letter to Angelo Majo: his dominant thought was the immense and infinite Love that had bent over his nothingness. Fr. Giussani witnessed to us a way of being together that can truly bring salvation, that is, liberate, so that our communion may be liberation. His recognition of Christ generated a kind of relationship that liberated us, challenged us, displaced us. The problem is not about being more or less close, or the number of people, or the frequency of our meetings; it is not about increasing the number of times we get together (more meetings or more dinners, according to personal taste), but it is the difference in the way we stay together! It is the difference that Fr. Aldo was describing yesterday between the way we often stay together and what he lives with Cleuza and Marcos, with Bracco, with Julián de la Morena. And the more one lives, the more it takes only an instant to perceive the difference. You do not need a

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<sup>61</sup> L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [*The I is Reborn in an Encounter*], *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>62</sup> *Gal* 2:20.

class on how to observe; it jumps to the eye immediately.

Then, how does the experience of Fr. Giussani remain today? The witnesses of the past days make us understand it in an even more existential way. First of all, we do not get back Fr. Giussani only by reading of the texts, just as we do not get Christ back only by reading the Bible. Johann Möhler (an author that Fr. Giussani liked to quote very much) used to say: “Without Scripture the characteristic form of the words of Jesus would remain hidden from us. We would not know *how* the Son of man spoke, and I think I would not wish to live any longer if I could not hear Him speak. But without tradition [without the beginning happening again, without this remaining contemporaneous with us] we would not know *who* spoke nor *what* He proclaimed, and [pay attention here!] the joy coming from His way of talking also would be lost!”<sup>63</sup> It is striking! Without the event happening now, also the joy we have experienced with Fr. Giussani would vanish; it vanishes—there is no more liberation.

Fr. Pino witnessed it to us yesterday: “When the book of Fr. Giussani, which you [Carron] used for the Lesson, was published, I read it and was very enthusiastic, and I even talked about it with you and Prades. However, when you gave the Lesson, something that had not happened either while reading the book or when discussing it with you happened. I asked myself: What happened? During the Lesson yesterday, that unmistakable initiative—which as a fact cannot be ‘interpreted’—which has been compared to the encounter of Christ with Zacchaeus, happened again: it took hold of my entire ‘I,’ in both reason and affection. I think that the defining point of the battle—in my life as in yours—is what comes before, which as a fact cannot be interpreted, which cannot be the object of a thousand interpretations, which is something that comes before any interpretation, exactly because it has a unique characteristic: it takes hold of the entire ‘I.’ The experience I had shows clearly that what makes us live is not just the recollection of a great presence that

<sup>63</sup> J. A. Möhler, *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, edited and translated with an introduction by Peter C. Erb, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1996, p. 120.

turned my life upside down (Fr. Giussani), or even the dialogue to interpret what makes me live. The initiative of Christ that changes my self-awareness, that awakens it completely, can give me back all the wealth of the past only if it happens now, in a specific place. ‘I live, no longer I, but You live in me.’” This is why—he was saying—the nature of Christianity is being played out in the *now*. “A thousand readings,” he finished by saying, “a thousand discussions do not make the event, but when this happens at a precise point, through your [Carron’s] *yes*, this sets in motion again the entire person, all my desire, all my waiting for Christ.”

This new knowledge has a source. Fr. Giussani says, “The new knowledge needs to be contemporaneous with the event that generates it and continuously sustains it. Since this source is not an idea but a place, a living reality, the new judgment is possible only in a constant relationship with this reality, that is, with the human companionship that prolongs in time the initial Event: this companionship proposes the authentic Christian point of view. The Event remains in history, and with it the source of the new judgment remains as well. Whoever gives precedence to his analysis or interpretations will end up adopting the way in which the world thinks, which will be different tomorrow from today. Only if we remain in the original position in which the Event generates the new knowledge, can we relate to reality without preconceptions, according to the totality of its factors. In fact, for man it is impossible to achieve by himself a judgment that is constantly open and without prejudices, as much as this kind of judgment is the only one that respects and exalts the dynamics of reason (which is to be open to reality according to the totality of its factors).”<sup>64</sup> Only the event allows the true nature of reason to emerge, and so it makes us able to understand. It is not only the texts, but the present event.

Not even simple recollection gives us back Fr. Giussani, as Prades said: “Since a year ago, a lot has changed at work, in the way I live my relationships. I had also difficult moments, where I found myself

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<sup>64</sup> L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo* [*Generating Traces in the History of the World*], Rizzoli, Milan, 1988, p. 75.

stuck and suffocating. I tried then to take the initiative. What kind of initiative? First of all, Fr. Giussani came to mind (memory—we said—is part of self-awareness), what he said, what I read, what he said to me personally in certain occasions, because this is a treasure in my life and if I felt that this relationship were to end, I would be lost. Yet, I cannot guarantee on my own the liveliness, the impact of this treasure, so much so that I cannot get out of the difficulty, that is, I do not experience the liberation I used to experience with him, by just remembering, because I am incapable of making him as present as he was at the time. I need a comparison in the present. This is why School of Community and the dialogue with you were decisive for me. Why am I convinced of this? Why is this comparison with a present factor convincing me? Because it gives me back the treasure of the past: Fr. Giussani. If I could not perceive reason and affection like Fr. Giussani taught me to, I would be lost; but in order to see him today I need a present companionship that brings the past to life and makes it active.”

Not even repeating the words “Communion and Liberation” gives Fr. Giussani back to us, because it is not words, it is an event. This is proven by the fact that at a certain point—as we saw—we are no longer even able to say how God looks at us, even after experiencing His gaze through Fr. Giussani. It is as if it became hazy.

Only something that happens now—this is why the “now” is crucial, as Fr. Giussani used to say—can make the experience of the past present. This is the value of what we lived together in these past days. What makes it present to us? A way of being together where the origin happens again: this is what we try to do each time we are together. What does it mean to “let in” that gaze that was revealed to us in the Christian encounter through Fr. Giussani? All that has happened from the first evening, from the introduction to the testimonies, to the way of being together, to the Lesson, has contributed to making Him present. Thus, our gestures are a paradigm of how we must stay together for it to be Christian communion, to bring liberation, to bring about something that liberates us. Each of us can recognize this by looking at what happened in the past days. The point is not about

increasing the number of meetings or dinners; it is the qualitative difference: either eating or drinking, we belong to the Lord.

How do we know it is a Christian communion? Because Christ makes Himself present in such a powerful way that it is totalizing, said Prades yesterday: “The presence of Christ in my life has an unmistakable feature: it is totalizing. I recognized God in my life because He threw me wide open to everything; He gave me the possibility to abandon myself completely. Often we think that other people are imposing. Instead, this totalizing experience is my salvation, my happiness. I have been involved completely, called to the depth of myself, interested in everything. This is the totalizing claim: not as someone who wants to grab something, take something away from me, but as someone who wants to give me back everything, beyond any measure of mine. This is why it is totalizing. Woe to us if the Movement ceased to be like this, because it would cease to be divine, it would not be a gift of the Spirit.” The most impressive sign of Christ’s contemporaneity is the re-awakening of the “I” in its totality that grants me a new understanding of things, a desire to change, a desire to adhere to that place which saves me. This shows Christ’s contemporaneity, because only the divine can save the human in its entirety.

In front of this newness, in front of the divine in action, each of us can surrender or resist, recognize Him or even deny His existence, as we saw in the Gospel of the man born blind. When we surrender to Christ’s presence, we experience all the signs of the Christian communion: the capacity to face everything without censoring anything—freedom, joy, peace—being interested in everything. We start to see the color of the grapes and the child who is smiling, as the song says. Everything becomes a sign, everything speaks to us, all of reality is given back to us with an intensity we did not know before. This is the power of Christ present: it is as if the hard core of our “I” became unstuck. Many times we can move about in restless activity, doing things from morning to evening, and the center of the “I” can still be blocked. And we know well that not just anything unblocks it: unless there is a present event, Fr. Giussani’s charism

becomes a memory of the past (we would be together only for a nostalgic recollection of the past). However, the disciples on the road to Emmaus will always remain in history to show, to shout to the entire world, the difference between a nostalgic memory and Christianity: “Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?”<sup>65</sup> For them, the past was not enough to change the present, not even by remembering it: “But we were hoping that He would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place.”<sup>66</sup> As striking as the past had been for their lives—and for them it meant to encounter Jesus in person!—it was not enough to make Him present, to challenge the new circumstances, to fill life with joy, to fill life with His presence now like then. The present event is needed. When it happens, we understand the meaning of conversion, what we are called to. Conversion is not moralism—it is not that I have to produce something, no: I have to surrender to this Presence that is calling me now; I have to comply with the burning in my heart and recognize He who is setting it on fire, that is, convert once again to that Love that is bending over my nothingness today.

We are well aware of how we can rebel against and resist this. But we do not need to be afraid of this resistance; on the contrary, we must face it, because it provides an even greater witness to Him; in fact, we do not resist something that does not exist, but something that is present, as Fr. Michele told us in the Homily. The fact that we are resisting Him is the proof that He exists! This contemporaneousness allows us to have now the same experience John and Andrew had, drawn to Him as to a magnet while they were looking at Him speak: it is He! It allows us to see happen again the very same experience we had with Fr. Giussani, with a different modality—not “how” but “what”—so that we can say, “Who are You, oh Christ, who fill my whole water jar, Who take hold of all of me?” This is what makes Him present to us. This is the Movement! This does not eliminate the friends, the companionship; rather, it generates a totally different

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<sup>65</sup> *Lk* 24:32.

<sup>66</sup> *Lk* 24:21.

friendship, a totally different type of relationship, a completely different affection for each other, true at last. It is by surrendering to Him that our unity, our communion, is generated. It happens as it happened at the beginning, when each of those twelve that Jesus called, by surrendering to Him, generated the first Christian communion. There will never be another origin of a Christian communion, never! Or do we think we can generate it by ourselves by mutual decision, or by more clever organizing, or by using some particular strategy?

I conclude by going back to Rose’s testimony, because it exposed one last point of confusion: reducing the problem to something that has to do with myself (Carrón), related to my person—that could be our last trick to avoid facing the real issue. What did Rose witness to us? “After Fr. Giussani’s death, I thought that my world had ended. When Carron took his place, since I trusted Fr. Giussani and I obeyed him, I did not have any objection, however, I was looking at him as the replacement, the new boss, nothing else. Then Carrón came to Uganda...” I spare you the rest because you know what happened. She saw what happened in her boys, something I had not realized myself, for sure: “While I was there looking for some of Carrón’s quotes in my notes, they were far ahead of me. [...] I challenged myself, saying, ‘Look at this, the world is changing and I am here trying to understand what they saw in Carrón, what Carrón did... but the Mystery changes whomever He wants, when He wants, and through anything He wants.’ So I said, ‘Now I am going to follow them myself [because it was so beautiful to see them singing]. I do not want to be left behind now.’” The true challenge proposed by the Mystery is not me, but what the Mystery does. Hence, you are free to discuss me—I could not care less; it is not my problem and I can go back to Madrid tonight—but this is the last trick in order not to face the true challenge: what happens. “I started to look at Carrón, to look at what he was looking at, and I stopped considering him a boss. Carrón came back to Kampala and spoke of Christ’s contemporaneity. [...] I, too, looked at him speaking. Looking at him, hearing what he was saying, looking at what he was looking at, I was changing. It was as if what he was talking about was becoming one thing with me,

and this was uniting me to Carrón. Now my gaze is fixed on where Carrón is looking, and while I am fixing my gaze, fixed on what he is looking at, I become one thing with what unites me to Carrón.” The struggle is not with me; it is with Him at work among us.

“True miracles bother people,”<sup>67</sup> says Leif Enger. People fear miracles because they are afraid of being changed. But, actually, this is the tenderness of the Mystery. What do we fear?

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<sup>67</sup> L. Enger, *Peace Like a River*, Grove Press, New York, 2001, p. 3.



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