

# HOW IS A PRESENCE BORN?

Notes from the talks by Davide Prospero and Julián Carrón  
at the Beginning Day for adults and university students of CL.  
Mediolanum Forum, Assago (Milan, Italy), September 28, 2013.

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*Razón de vivir*  
*La strada*

*Discendi Santo Spirito*

**DAVIDE PROSPERI**

Welcome. I say this informally, because if we are here, it is not a formal act; our being here today and in all the points in Italy connected by satellite link-up to participate in this gesture of the whole Movement is because of a judgment. Very often a gesture testifies to the truth more than rivers of words. This year we have seen this often in many gestures we have proposed, experienced, and participated in, including gestures of the whole Church. The judgment that we affirm with this gesture is that we have a certainty: we know—this is the certainty—what we want to follow. This is why we are here. Beginning again, beginning again every year, is what increases certainty and the desire for destiny in those who do not want to stop journeying.

“How can one live?” We chose this question, starting from the points that emerged from the reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, as the theme for this summer, in our vacations and gatherings. In its simplicity, this title embraces everyone, so that even those who do not live an experience like ours sooner or later must ask themselves this question, because it concerns every person. Even though it is simple, it presents an extraordinary challenge because, in responding to this question, words fall short. We do not answer with a discourse or explanations that someone gives us or that we give ourselves; we only answer by living. The answer to this question is a life.

So then, this is why every year we make the effort to judge, to try to judge what we have lived the previous year, because we want to grow looking first of all at our experience. This time, we have the help of the extraordinary letter Pope Francis wrote to Eugenio Scalfari, published in *la Repubblica* in response to his questions this summer. Without any presumption, but only with immense gratitude, I believe that we all felt comforted by the Pope’s words, thinking back over the journey we have made in these years. The Pope wrote: “For those who live their Christian faith, this does not mean either fleeing from the world or seeking dominance, but rather it denotes service to the person as a whole and to all peoples, starting with those living on the margins, all the while keeping alive the sense of hope that

compels us to work for the good of all, looking to the future” (Pope Francis, “Letter to a Non-Believer,” *la Repubblica*, September 11, 2013, p. 2).

Just think what these words mean for us after the choices we made this year, for example, in facing the national elections and those of the Lombardy Region, where we were particularly in the spotlight because of the adventure of Roberto Formigoni. In the general confusion of that period, when every day proposals for parties, coalitions, and alliances were born and died, the interesting thing for me was that when we gathered to understand how to look at what was happening, we did not settle for trying to align ourselves with the lesser of several evils (we remember it well) but we took advantage of the occasion to ask what truly interests us most in a situation like this, what is at the heart of our life. To repeat the line of Fr. Giussani that we constantly quote among ourselves: What do we hold most dear for ourselves and for all, which we can tell everyone (also publicly)? This is the question we asked ourselves in that situation, and we chose to let it be a verification of our maturity. I must say that in this verification process, the journey of these years was without a doubt the determining factor, because the judgment that emerged, and was then expressed in our flyer, entitled, “A note by CL on the political situation, in view of the upcoming electoral deadlines” (January 2, 2013), was that the one thing we must truly defend, that we cannot do without, is the experience we have through what we have encountered, and that the truth of this is verified by seeing whether it can generate an original presence, a witness to the newness Christ introduces to life, a new actor within society, in any sphere, even politics, and that one must be able to see this even in a confused situation (as the Pope said, “Christian faith... does not mean either fleeing from the world or seeking dominance”!).

Pope Benedict XVI’s withdrawal from the papacy a few weeks later gave us a prime example of this new man. When the whole world saw him pass through the doors of the Vatican, with everyone around him crying while he, instead, was certain and glad, they saw the human stature to which we are called. In what does our human certainty consist? What does it generate in a relationship with reality? That situation showed it clearly: in the face of such apparent defeat, not around the corner but right there before everyone’s eyes (because for the world it was a defeat: his



strength failed him and he had to resign), how can a man be so certain and glad? You cannot fake anything in such a situation; you know that everyone is watching you. How can a man be this way?

What each of us seeks in life is always a satisfaction, something that truly fulfills what we feel we were made for, with no half measures. Much of our angst and difficulty comes precisely from the fact that we think the achievement of this satisfaction depends on what we do, what we produce, and others' recognition of it. But in the face of a circumstance like this (think also of how many contradictions or defeats each of us is forced to face), is a fully human satisfaction possible or not? We are made for the exceptional, not the banal, but life's ideal is that the exceptional, this greatness, can be experienced within normal daily life. That which satisfies life is something given, the living relationship (this was seen in the Pope's gesture) with a beloved presence. This relationship with the beloved Presence is given, already given, desired, because this gives life an expectancy, a certainty, a new beginning in any moment of life, even at the age of 86, when it seems that a man has failed and there is no more time: what does tomorrow hold for me? If my today is the relationship with this Presence, then my tomorrow is the discovery, the curiosity to learn how this Presence will return and manifest His victory again.

This fact accompanied us during this time, together with the judgments of Carrón and those that emerged among us in the journey of our companionship during the year, in particular on the occasion of the National Assembly of CL Responsibles in Pacengo, Italy, when it became clear that

truly for us the substance of life lies in this satisfaction, and so this certainty does not mean we already know everything and then, at most, have to explain it to the others, but expect nothing else for ourselves—a certainty, we say, that is conceited and presumptuous. No, ours is a curious certainty. It is a certainty at the starting line, one that always throws us forward. I'll read some more from Pope Francis' letter: "Clearly, then, faith is not intransigent, but grows in respectful coexistence with others. One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all" (*Ibid.*).

Our certainty—this, in short, is what I discovered this year through what we have experienced—is not that we already know how things will end, but that we want to discover it. The truth that Christ has introduced into our life is a presence, His presence. This throws us into an open sea. Again, the Pope: "To begin with, I would not speak about 'absolute' truths, even for believers, in the sense that absolute is that which is disconnected and bereft of all relationship" (*Ibid.*). Instead, truth is a relationship, and our experience documents this fact. But this is true not only for us. It is true for everyone, even for those who deny it or maybe do not know it. So, together with the initial question—"How can one live?"—right away another one arose: "What is our task? What are we doing here in the world?" At this year's Meeting, we were provoked right off the bat the first day, by this question in the [Italian daily newspaper] *Corriere* ➤

» *della Sera*: Do we want to become a faction or do we want to testify to an original presence?

In the light of all that we have experienced, my question for you is: What is the meaning of our presence in the world?

**JULIÁN CARRÓN**  
**HOW CAN ONE LIVE?**

This summer, I happened to be preparing the Spiritual Exercises for the *Memores Domini* on the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene. The Liturgy offered two texts that showed how the Church wanted us to look at her according to all her expectant waiting and all her yearning. The first was a passage from the *Song of Songs*, which describes what life was like for a person like Mary: “On my bed at night I sought Him whom my heart loves—I sought Him but I did not find Him. I will rise then and go about the city; in the streets and crossings I will seek Him whom my heart loves. I sought Him but I did not find Him. The watchmen came upon me as they made their rounds of the city: Have you seen Him whom my heart loves? I had hardly left them when I found Him whom my heart loves” (*The Song of Songs*, 3:1-4). In listening to this passage, I said to myself: How I would like to have something of this passion! Mary testifies to us the heart that we would like to have in our innermost being, because the “I” of each of us is this search for a love that holds up against the challenges of living.

In reading the Gospel text, I was surprised that one could trace the two questions we asked ourselves as the work for this summer: “How can one live?” and “What are we Christians called to do here in the world?”

“On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, when it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put Him”” (*Jn* 20:1-2).

“But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. [This is life. How can one live? Without finding that presence, without finding that beloved presence, the love of our heart, every morning is reason for weeping. Then, we can distract ourselves during the day, but life remains something to weep about, if we do not find the love of our heart, that love that fills life with meaning, intensity, and warmth.] And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in

white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they have laid Him.’ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?’ [This is the nexus: “Whom are you looking for?” I am looking for the love of my heart. I am looking for that presence that can fill my life. This is why the Church shows us how to look at Mary Magdalene with this passage of the *Song of Songs*, which speaks to us of a woman searching for the love of her heart.] She thought it was the gardener and said to Him, ‘Sir, if you carried Him away, tell me where you laid Him, and I will take Him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni,’ which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, ‘Stop holding on to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and tell them, “I am going to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.”’ Mary of Magdala went [right away] and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord,’ and what He told her” (*Jn* 20:11-18).

In this passage, we have the answer to both questions: “How can one live?” and “What are we called to do here in the world?” For Mary, only in responding to the first—“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”—finding the presence she was seeking and that responded to her weeping, did she have something to communicate and go tell the others: “I have seen the Lord!”

It is a great consolation for each of us that this happened to someone unknown like Mary Magdalene, because it helps us understand that no precondition or standard must be met, no particular gift is required to seek Him. This search can even be hidden in the depths of our being, under all the detritus of our evil or forgetfulness, but nothing can eliminate it, just as nothing can stop that woman from seeking. To discover this striving in ourselves, we only need that “original morality,” that total openness, that deep down coincidence-with-self, that not-remoteness-from-self that leads you to say, “On my bed at night I sought Him whom my heart loves,” “Have you seen Him whom my heart loves?” This is the original openness we see in other characters of the Gospel, all poor wretches like us, but whom nobody could stop from seeking Him, like Zacchaeus, who climbed the tree, full of curiosity to see Jesus, or

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the Samaritan woman, full of thirst and desirous of the one water that could quench her thirst. Looking at these Gospel figures, we have no excuses, because they are all poor wretches like us, but are striving to seek Him, defined by the search for Him and by the passion for Him that disarms all our worries, all our moralistic reasoning to justify not seeking Him. None of us finds it difficult to imagine what happened inside them when Jesus, bending over their nothingness, called them by name. How amazed they must have been! How much more inflamed they must have been with the passion for Him, the desire to seek Him!

“Mary!” How all of Jesus’ humanity must have vibrated in being able to say her name with such a tone, accent, intensity, and familiarity that Mary recognized Him immediately, when just an instant before she had mistaken Him for the gardener. “Mary!” It is as if all the tenderness of the Mystery reached that woman through the vibration of the humanity of the Risen Jesus, now unveiled, but not for this reason any less intense; rather, with all the humanity of the Risen Jesus vibrating with the fact that that woman existed. “Mary!” So then, you understand how in that moment she realized who He was. She was able to realize who He was because He made all His humanity vibrate to the point of making her feel such an intensity, fullness, and overabundance that she could never have imagined before, and that she could experience only in the relationship with Him. Without Him, she would never have known who she was or what life could be and become, what intensity of fullness life could reach.

What is Christianity if not that presence, all vibrating for the destiny of an unknown woman, that made her understand what He brought, what He is for life? What newness entered history through the modality with which Christ communicates it! Jesus made us understand what Christianity is by saying to a woman, “Mary!” This communication of being, of “more being,” of “more Mary” revealed to that woman who Jesus is. It is not a theory or speech or explanation, but an event that turned the lives of all those who entered into a relationship with Him upside down, in one way or another, and that the Gospels, in their disarming simplicity, communicate in the simplest, the most naive way, simply saying the name: “Mary!”, “Zacchaeus!”,

“Matthew!”, “Woman, do not weep!” What communication of Himself must have happened in them to mark their lives so powerfully, to the point that they could no longer look at reality, at themselves, without being bowled over by that Presence, by that voice, by that intensity with which their name was spoken.

One understands the upheaval that runs through every page of the Gospel in the face of an experience like this. Unfortunately, we are already used to the repercussion and no longer feel it; everything is taken for granted, already known! But it is not necessarily this way, and we see this when a man like Pope Francis testifies to us his wonder today: “The best summary, the one that comes more from the inside and I feel most true is this: I am a

sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.” ... “I am one who is looked upon by the Lord” (“Interview with Pope Francis,” edited by Antonio Spadaro, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, III/2013, p. 451).

All that event, that unique way of relating to the other, of an “I,” Jesus, who enters into relationship with a “you,” Mary, making her become herself, that “Mary!” that causes an upheaval in that woman, the heart-melting yearning that

filled her, is seen in the way she answers: “Rabbouni! Teacher!” In the austere language of the Gospel, Saint John comments, “She turned” upon hearing her name. This is conversion: it is anything but moralism! Conversion is a recognition: “Teacher!” It is the response to the love of One who, saying our name with an affective intensity never before seen, makes us discover ourselves. Acknowledging Him is the answer to His passion that reawakens all her affective capacity, because One called her by name in such a way that generated a new relationship with things, called “virginity.” “Stop holding on to Me,” Jesus says to Mary Magdalene. There is no need to hold on. Any other thing is nothing compared to an instant of this affective intensity that Mary experienced with Jesus.

This surge of emotion is what drives her to turn to Jesus with the passion with which she says, “Rabbouni! Teacher!” In fact, Mary’s answer was entirely the fruit of the way she heard herself called by name, entirely flowing from that unique upheaval that Jesus provoked in her. ►►



*Communion of the Apostles.*

» This is anything but moralism! Not in your wildest dreams! The powerful movement of emotion she felt at the communication of being, through Jesus, is what moved her to say “Teacher!” with all her affection.

#### **THE EVENT THAT EVERY PERSON UNKOWINGLY AWAITS**

This heart-thawing yearning that Mary felt was present first in the humanity of Jesus, entirely vibrating with passion for that woman, which became flesh to communicate itself through His flesh, His being moved, His gaze, His way of speaking, the tone of His voice. This is the newness that entered history and that today, like yesterday, the human person, each of us, awaits. “Man today,” said Fr. Giussani at the Bishops’ Synod on the Laity in 1987, “expects perhaps unconsciously the experience of the encounter with people for whom the fact of Christ is such a present reality that their life is changed. What will shake today’s man is a human impact, an event that echoes the initial event, when Jesus raised His eyes and said, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry down. I mean to stay at your house today’” (cf. *Lk 19:5*). (L. Giussani, “From Baptism, a New Creature,” in *Traces*, Vol. 8, No. 6 [June] 2006, p. 23, from an excerpt printed in *L’avvenimento Cristiano [The Christian Event]*, Bur, Milan, 2003, pp. 23-24.)

This is the event that has bowled us over, too. This event, the echo of the initial event, reached us through the person of Fr. Giussani, through the humanity and the vibration for Christ to which we are witnesses, so much so that many of us would not be here if we had not been touched, if we had not been bowled over by the way he communicated Christ to us. We will become more aware of what happened to us in this encounter with Fr. Giussani when we read his biography, which was just published in Italian. Through him, the same vibration that touched Mary reaches us today, not “like” the one then, but “the one” then, the same as then, that same event that reached Mary. And each of us must look at her or his own experience, must go back to the origin of that original move, to see the first dawn break precisely there, the first desire to belong to Christ. There is no other source of belonging but the experience of Christianity lived as a present event. This alone was enough for us to feel a crazy desire to be “His.”

As always, Fr. Giussani helps us to become aware of the import of what happened to us; in fact, “what is Christianity if not the event of a new man who by his nature becomes a new protagonist on the scene of the world?” (*Ibid.* p. 23), because the fundamental issue is the event of this new creature, of this new creation, of this new birth.

#### **THE BEGINNING OF A NEW KNOWLEDGE**

Only if such a powerful Presence permeates our life are we spared the need to raise our arms in front of our face to defend ourselves from the blows of circumstances in order to live. And yet many times we are so wounded by the repercussion of circumstances that the journey of knowledge is impeded, and then everything becomes truly suffocating, because it is as if we only see reality in terms of our wounds. Like Mary, who looked at reality through her weeping and could no longer see anything else—she could not even recognize Jesus! Then He appears, calls her by name, and everything begins anew; He enables her to recognize Him, to begin to look at reality differently, because His presence is more powerful than any wound and so her gaze is thrown wide open again, to be able to see reality in its truth. “He was seen, and he saw,” Saint Augustine said of Zacchaeus (*Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, Vol II, 174, 4.4, Oxford, John Henry Parker, p. 893).

Friends, how different life would be for each of us if we let that gaze enter, no matter what wounds we bear!

This is why Fr. Giussani insisted on the fact that Jesus entered history to educate us to a true knowledge of reality, because we think we already know what reality is, but without Him we are assailed by fear, we freeze and then we suffocate in the circumstances. Instead, with Jesus, everything opens up again, as if He were telling us, “Look, I came to educate you to the true relationship with reality, to the right position that enables you to have a new gaze on reality.” If we do not experience this, if we do not continually let in His gaze, His presence, we live reality like everyone else. Only if Jesus enters, and makes the new knowledge possible, will we be able to bring to the world a different way of staying in reality. All circumstances are given to us for this, to provoke us to this new knowledge, to see what Jesus is: a Presence that enables us to live reality in a different, new way. This shows us that all circumstances are not obstacles,

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as we so often see them, because we are unable to see the attraction they hold within, so defined are we by the wound. We have already reduced them because we think we already know what the circumstance is. We think we already know there is nothing new to discover within it, that it is simply to be borne and that we can only try moralistically to endure that suffocation.

Instead, only if a Presence happens again, as happened to Mary Magdalene, can our journey of knowledge continue and our gaze be thrown wide open, because we have much more than “knowledge” of the answers to all the objections or challenges: we have “the” answer. However, the answer does not consist, as we think, in having the instruction manual for living, because the instruction manual became flesh, is a Presence, is the Word; the content is a presence, the content is a You, the You who reached Mary. This is why if truth is disconnected and is lacking in this relationship, you do not understand. As Pope Francis wrote to Eugenio Scalfari, “Truth, according to the Christian faith, is the love of God for us in Jesus Christ. Therefore, truth is a relationship” (Pope Francis, “Letter to Non-Believers,” *op. cit.*, p. 2). It is like a child who realizes she does not know many things, but one thing she does know: she has her mother and father, and they know, so what is the problem? If I am certain of this Presence that invades life, I can face any circumstance, any wound, any objection, any repercussion, any attack (this is the value of certainty that Davide Prospero spoke about), because all this throws me wide open to expecting the way the Mystery will show Himself, to suggest the answer to me—to accompany me even in entering darkness—and according to a design that is not mine.

What a difference in the way of staying in reality, when you have questions, when you have open questions, because it is there, when you pray Lauds or when you observe silence or when you listen to a friend or when you have a coffee or when you read the newspaper, that you are poised to discover, to intercept any crumb of truth that can come to help you! This way, everything becomes interesting, because if I did not have the question, if I did not have the

wound, if I did not have a total openness, I could not even recognize it, I would not even realize it. This is why ours is a “very human journey,” not made of hallucinations or visions, but of participation in an “adventure of knowledge” that enables us to discover more and more the attraction that lies within any limitation, within any difficulty, because any challenge or any circumstance, even painful ones, always have within them something true, otherwise they would not exist.

**WHAT ARE WE CALLED TO DO HERE IN THE WORLD?**

It is from this experience of living that we can respond to the question, “What are we called to do here in the world?” We are understanding more and more what our task is, not in spite of the circumstances but through them. It has always been this way in the life of the Movement, Fr. Giussani reminds us, and now we can understand more clearly what he said in 1976, as he looked back on what the Movement had gone through in previous years, and what had emerged regarding the meaning of our being in the world. He said that there are two possibilities for being present in reality: either being a “reactive presence,” determined by our reaction, or being an “original presence,” born from what happened to us.

“Reactive means determined by the moves made by others, not our own, i.e., [in reality] offering initiatives, using ways of speaking, creating instruments that are not generated as an all-embracing method by our new personality, but suggested by the use of words, the creation of instruments, the attitude and behavior of our adversaries.” Since we are still “playing on their home field,” defined by the others, then “a reactive presence cannot help falling into two errors. Either it becomes a *reactionary* presence, i.e., attached to its own positions as ‘forms,’ without the contents—the motives, the roots—being so clear as to come alive... ; or [it is only an] *imitation* of others.” Instead, “*an original presence* [is] a presence in accord with our originality” (L. Giussani, “From Utopia to Presence,” *Traces*, Vol. 4, No. 11 [December] 2002, Word Among Us, p. II). That is, presence is the realization of communion with ►►



Crucifixion with Saint Longinus.

» Christ and among ourselves. Mary, Matthew, and Zacchaeus bring to reality a position defined by that communion with Him that was generated by His strong movement of emotion, communicated in saying their names. When this happens to each of us, the communion among us is expressed as presence according to our originality.

**AN ORIGINAL PRESENCE**

“A presence is original when it springs forth from the consciousness of one’s own identity and one’s affection for it, and finds its consistence in this” (*Ibid.*, p. II), because it is what truly satisfies life, as Fr. Giussani always told us, quoting Saint Thomas Aquinas: “Man’s life consists in the affection which sustains him most, for there he finds his greatest satisfaction” (*Summa Theologiae*, IIa, IIae, q. 179, a. 1 co.). The substance of life is there, where we find the greatest satisfaction.

So then, what is our identity? “Identity is knowing who we are and why we exist, with a dignity that gives us the right to hope for ‘something better’ for our life and the life of the world because of our presence.” And who are we? “Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*Gal 3:26-28*). What happened in Baptism became perceptible for us in our history and in our awareness through the encounter with the Movement; only then did we understand the importance of what happened, of that battle Christ began with us in Baptism to win us over, as *vir pugnator*. We became aware of it when, encountering the Movement, we were won over through the way our name was called. Then we understood what Saint Paul meant when he wrote, “You have been seized and made one with Christ” (*Gal 3:27*).

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you” (*Jn. 15:16*). “This is an objective choice that we can never rid ourselves of again; it is a penetration of our being that does not depend on us and that we can no longer erase.” This is our identity. Fr. Giussani continues, “There is nothing culturally more revolutionary than this conception of the

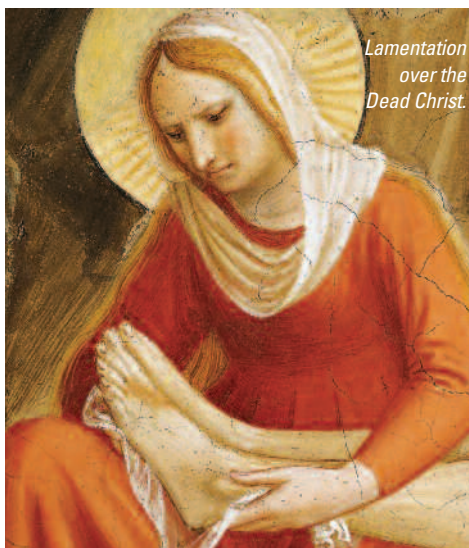
person, whose meaning, whose substance is unity with Christ, with an Other, and through this, a unity with all those whom He seizes, with all those whom the Father puts into His hands” (L. Giussani, “From Utopia to Presence,” *op. cit.*, p. II). This is what we must understand because, we see in the littleness of our life, this conception of our person—which is such only because there is One who speaks our name again, otherwise we would still be there weeping at the fact of living—is not an abstraction. It is an experience, not a notion, and precisely from this flows a self-awareness of ourselves like the one born in Mary, who could no longer look at herself as before, but as entirely defined by that “Mary!”

“Our identity is to be one with Christ. Being one with Christ is the constitutive dimension of our person. If Christ defines my personality, you, who have been seized by Him, necessarily enter into the dimension of my personality... [For this reason,] whether I am alone in my room, or three of us are together studying at the university, or twenty of us eating together in the cafeteria, everywhere and in any case, this is our identity. The problem is, therefore, our self-awareness, the content of the consciousness of ourselves: ‘It is no longer I who live, but it is You who live in me’ (*Gal 2:20*). [Therefore, our identity is manifested in this new self-awareness.] This is the true

*new man* in the world—the new man who was Che Guevara’s dream and the lying pretext for cultural revolutions by which people in power have tried and still try to take the people into their hands, in order to subjugate them according to their ideology; and this new man is born above all not out of being consistent, but as a *new consciousness of self*.”

“Our identity manifests itself in a new experience within us [in the way we live any circumstance and any challenge of reality] and among us: the experience of *affection for Christ and the Mystery of the Church, which finds its closest concreteness in our unity*. The identity is the living experience of affection for Christ and for our unity.”

“The word ‘affection’ is the greatest and most comprehensive of all our ways of expressing ourselves. It indicates much more an ‘attachment’ that is born out of a value judgment—the acknowledgment of what there is in



Lamentation  
 over the  
 Dead Christ.



us and among us—than a sentimental, ephemeral facility as fleeting as a leaf at the mercy of the wind. And in faithfulness to the judgment, that is, in faithfulness to the faith, as one grows older this attachment increases and becomes more sturdy, vibrant, and powerful” (*Ibid.*, p. IV).

**A FACT WITHIN WHICH WE CAN TRULY SINK**

“This living experience of Christ and our unity is the locus of *hope*, therefore of the welling forth of the *gusto* of life and the possible blossoming of *joy*—which does not have to leave out or deny anything in order to affirm itself; and it is the locus of the recovery of a *thirst to change one’s life*, the desire that one’s life be consistent, that it change by virtue of what it is at bottom, that it may be worthier of the Reality it carries.”

“The passion to change one’s life [not the justification of our errors!] lives within the experience of Christ and our unity. And it is the opposite of moralism: not a law to which we conform, but a love to which we adhere, a presence to follow more and more with all of ourselves [mamma mia!], a fact within which we can truly sink [to be entirely enveloped by this bottomless and infinite love: “a fact within which we can truly sink”].... The serene, well-balanced, and at the same time passionate desire to change oneself thus becomes a daily reality [the desire to be His, to belong to Him more, to seek Him continually]—without any shadow of pietism or moralism. It becomes a love for the truth of one’s being [a seeker of the beloved], a desire as wonderful and as uncomfortable as thirst” (*Ibid.*).

However, all this must become mature, because we are still confused, says Fr. Giussani. If this small kernel of a beginning does not become mature, the first storm will crush it. We will no longer be able to struggle “unless that initial ring of truth ripens to maturity; we can no longer bear, as Christians, the enormous mountain of work, responsibility, and toil to which we are called. For people are not brought together by initiatives [this is not what gives substance]; what brings them together is the ring of truth of a presence, which is given by the Reality that is among us and which we ‘carry’—Christ and His Mystery made visible in our unity.”

“Pursuing more deeply the idea of presence,” continues Fr. Giussani, “we must then redefine our community. The community is not a cluster of people to carry out initia-

tives [1976!]; it is not the attempt to construct a party organization [1976!]. *The community is the locus of the effective construction of our person*, i.e., of a mature faith.” Each of us must decide whether to follow Fr. Giussani or to follow our own ideas about what Fr. Giussani says.

“The purpose of the community is *to generate adults in the faith*. What the world needs is the presence of adults in the faith, not capable professionals or competent workers, for society is full of these but all of them can be contested profoundly in their capacity to create humanity.”

“The method by which the community becomes the locus of the person’s construction of a mature faith is... ‘follow.’ *To follow* means to become one with persons who live the faith more maturely, [pay attention!] *to become involved in a living experience*, that ‘passes’ (*tradit* in Latin, which gives us ‘tradition’) its dynamism and its *gusto* into us [this is the sinking into a living experience, into a fact]. This dynamism and this *gusto* pass into us not through our reasoning, not at the conclusion of a logical process, but, as it were, by osmosis [look!]: it is a new heart that communicates itself to ours; it is the heart of another that begins to move inside our own life [this is hardly following an instruction manual or just doing what the others say! It is the heart of an Other that begins to move inside our own heart].”

“From this arises the foundational idea of our pedagogy of *authority*: truly authoritative for us are the persons who draw us in with their hearts, their dynamism, and their

*gusto*, born out of faith. *True authoritativeness, then, is the definition of friendship.*”

“True friendship is the *profound companionship to our destiny*... [this is why I always think of the image that is so familiar to us of Peter and John running to the tomb with eyes wide open, together striving toward destiny. Each of us can compare this with the usual concept of friendship we live. Striving together toward destiny. Not “non-friendship,” but what friendship!]. And it is not a question of temperament...: true friendship is felt in the heart of the word and the gesture of presence” (*Ibid.*, p. VII). Everything needs to enter into life this way, “faith as a ‘reagent’ on concrete life, so that we are led to see the identity between faith and what is more truly human [so we can verify that, living life in the faith of the Son of God who gave His life for us, everything becomes more true]—in faith, our humanity becomes more true [and»

**“A presence is original when it springs forth from the consciousness of one’s own identity and one’s affection for it, and finds its consistence in this.” The substance of life is there, where we find the greatest satisfaction.**

» either this is our own experience, increasingly more true, or we can continue to “remain” in the Movement with our hearts shifting elsewhere, not out of malevolence, but simply because it does not to grasp us].”

“All this must become true in us, and this is why time has been given to us. The search for truth is the adventure for which time is turned into history,” acquires its value as time. Otherwise, Giussani says, we yield to the “temptation of utopia,” that is, “placing our hope and our dignity in a ‘project’ generated by us” (*Ibid.*, p. VI).

### WHAT SAVES THE HUMAN PERSON

At this point, Fr. Giussani lists all the phases of the history of the Movement and says: “We did not come into the schools trying to formulate an alternative project for the schools [pay attention, now]. We came in *with the consciousness of bringing What saves man also into the schools.*” We can say the same of everything. Then he recounts when this began to dim in 1963 and 1964, and then in 1968. But look at what he says: what did those who went away, who were not loyal, faithful to that original beginning—what did they betray? The presence. What do we betray? The presence, unless we are rooted in the beginning. Not the “non-presence,” because we can fill our lives with things, as they filled theirs with initiatives. What did they betray? What do we betray? The presence, not the absence. “The project had taken the place of presence” (*Ibid.*, p. VII). This is very clear to us now. We have seen what we have gained by going along with certain alignments, but only now do we begin to realize how much we have lost, in terms of presence, of original presence, of our originality. We have to decide whether to become a faction or an original presence. This does not mean that to be “for” everyone we can belong to no one. No, it means the opposite. To be for everybody, it is necessary to be of One, because only He can give us that satisfaction of which Davide spoke, that makes us free to be truly ourselves, to be an original presence and not a reactive presence.

What are we called to do here in the world? Fr. Giussani continued, “*What is new is presence* as awareness of carrying something definitive—a definitive judgment on the world, the truth of the world and the human—that is expressed in our unity. What is new is presence as awareness that our unity is the instrument for the rebirth and liberation of the world” (*Ibid.*, p. VIII). We cannot replace this

with any idea or project we have in our minds. As Cardinal Scola wrote in his most recent Pastoral Letter: “It is not a matter of a project, much less a calculation. Full of gratitude, Christians intend to ‘give back’ the gift they unworthily have received and that therefore asks to be communicated with the same gratuitousness” (A. Scola, *Il campo è il mondo* [*The Field is the World*], Pastoral Letter, Centro Ambrosiano, Milan, 2013, p. 40).

Why are we tempted to replace faith with a project? Because we think that faith, the Christian community as a presence, does not have enough of an impact, is unable to change reality, and thus we believe we have to add something, not as an expression of what we are—it is inevitable that this should find expression—but as an addition, because faith is lacking something in order to be concrete, as if Jesus lacked something and had to add something else to His testimony of Himself. This was the thought of

all those who believed that Christianity, lived according to tradition, was insufficient for being present, and it is our thought, too, that the Movement at times is not enough. Therefore, this is a precious opportunity to pursue the question: What are we? What are we called to do in the world?

Fr. Giussani continues, “*What is new is the presence of this event* of new affection and new humanity; it is the presence of this *beginning of the new world* that we are. What is new is not the avant-garde, but the Remnant of Israel, *the unity of those for whom what happened is everything* [not a piece to which we must add something; what happened is

everything!] and who await only the manifestation of the promise, the realization of what is inside what happened. What is new is not, then, a future to be pursued; it is not a cultural, social, and political project. What is new is presence. [What weight these words acquire now! We see it testified to daily by Pope Francis: he needs nothing more than the fact of putting himself, disarmed, before everyone, because] being a presence does not mean not expressing oneself; presence, too, is expression” [but it is something markedly different] (L. Giussani, *From Utopia to Presence*, *op. cit.*, pp. VIII-IX).

The difference lies in the diversity of our method of expression. “Utopia uses as its method of expression speech, projects, and the anxious search for instruments and organizational forms. Presence has as its method of expression an operative friendship, gestures revealing a different way of being a protagonist, one that enters everything, making use

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*Pious Women at the Tomb  
(detail of Mary Magdalene).*

of everything (school desks, studies, the attempt at university reform, etc.)—gestures that are, above all, gestures of real humanity, i.e., of charity. A new reality is not built by speeches or organizational projects, but by living gestures of new humanity in the present.” Each of us, every com-

munity, must think about this: how we can enter reality with gestures of real humanity, that is, of charity. Therefore, it is not “the abolition of a responsibility,” but a different way of conceiving of responsibility. “I indicated what has to happen so that we may work more, be more in- ➤➤

» cursive on reality, and with greater and greater gladness, not in exhaustion and bitterness that divide us from each other. The task that awaits us is the expression of an aware presence, capable of being critical and systematic. This task implies a job. *This job is to put our identity into the materialness of life. My identity, in as much as it penetrates the materialness of life, that is to say, in as much as it is inside the condition of existence, works and makes me react* (*Ibid.*, p. IX).

Fr. Giussani said all these things to us in 1976, and in the 1990s he insisted again, even more radically: “Since the 1976 Equipe, entitled, *From Utopia to Presence*, we have made a journey that now pushes us to explore and reach the core of the word presence: we need to explore it and reach the core... because presence is in the person, exclusively in the person, in you [that is, in the new creature]. Presence is a topic that coincides with your ‘I.’ Presence is born and consists in the person.... And the thing that defines the person as actor and protagonist of a presence is the clarity of faith [we see this well in Pope Francis], that clarity of consciousness that is called faith..., that clarity of consciousness that naturally is called intelligence, because faith is the ultimate aspect of intelligence; it is intelligence that reaches its ultimate horizon, that identifies its destiny, identifies that of which everything consists, identifies the truth of things, identifies the just and the good life, identifies the great presence, that great presence that enables the transfiguring manipulation of things, through which things become beautiful, things become just, things become good, and everything organizes itself in peace. Presence consists entirely in the person, is born and consists in the person and the person is intelligence of reality to the point of touching the ultimate horizon” (L. Giussani, *Un evento reale nella vita dell'uomo* [*A Real Event in the Life of Man*], *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143).

For this reason, the two questions—“How can one live?” and “What are we called to do in the world?”—go together. The factor that unites them is the person, because we can deceive ourselves, filling life with initiatives to avoid converting to Him. But how different it is when the initiatives are the expression of this conversion, of our belonging to Him. As Fr. Giussani reminds us, “The presence of Christ, in day-to-day living, increasingly involves the beating of the heart: being moved by His presence becomes being moved in daily life and illuminates, beautifies, and softens the tenor of daily life, more and more. Nothing is useless, nothing is

extraneous, because nothing is extraneous to your destiny, and therefore there is nothing of which you cannot become fond [not endure, but become fond of!]. You can become fond of everything, affection is born for everything, everything, with its magnificent consequences of respect for the thing you do, precision in the thing you do, loyalty with your concrete work, tenacity in pursuing your goal; you become more tireless” (*Ibid.*, pp. 103-104). As this passage from the prophet Isaiah says: “Though young men faint and grow weary, and youths stagger and fall, they that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles’ wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint (*Is* 40:30-31).”

#### **A GENERATIVE GLADNESS**

When this penetrates to our innermost being, it fills our life with gladness. This is the ultimate litmus test that Fr. Giussani leaves to us. How many truly glad people do we know? Without gladness, there is no generation, no presence. Gladness is what links the two questions, “How can one live?” and “What are we called to do in the world?”—because without an answer for the first, there is no answer for the second either, and thus there is no gladness. Fr. Giussani insists that gladness is the condition for generating: “Gladness is the reverberation of the certainty of happiness, of the Eternal, and it comes from certainty and the will to journey [a certainty that sets us on the road], awareness of the journey one is making.... ‘With this gladness it is possible to look at everything with fondness’ [with this gladness it is possible to generate things differently] ...because looking

with fondness at someone you find uncongenial is the generation of a new thing in the world, is the generation of a new event. Gladness is the condition for generation. Joy is the condition for fruitfulness. Being glad is the indispensable condition for generating a different world, a different humanity. But we have a figure in this sense who should be of consolation for us, or of consoling sureness, Mother Teresa of Calcutta.... Hers is a generative gladness, fruitful: she does not move a finger without changing something. And her gladness is not a forced, artificial laugh, no, no, no! Her face is entirely, profoundly full of the sadness of things, like the face of Christ.... [But] sadness, being a transitory condition [is] a condition of the journey... [therefore] even our evil does not take away [from us our] gladness; ...gladness is like a cactus flower, that in a plant of thorns generates something beautiful” (*Ibid.*, pp. 240-241). **I**

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