



"CAN A MAN BE BORN
AGAIN, ONCE HE IS OLD?"

EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY
OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION



RIMINI 2010

**“CAN A MAN BE BORN AGAIN,
ONCE HE IS OLD?»**

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Translated by William Vouk III

On the cover: Jacob Jordaens, *Christ and Nicodemus*, Musée des Beaux Arts, Tournai, Belgium
(Foto Scala, Florence, Italy).

Vatican City, April 20, 2010

*Reverend Father
Julián Carrón
President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*

On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme “Can a man be born again, once he is old?” the Supreme Pontiff turns his affectionate thoughts to the participants and, while he wishes that this blessed encounter may inspire renewed fidelity to Christ, the only source of hope for an enthusiastic evangelical witness, he invokes a generous outpouring of heavenly enlightenment and sends you and the responsables of the Fraternity and all those gathered a special apostolic blessing.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State for His Holiness

Friday evening, April 23

Before the introduction and after the conclusion:

Franz Schubert, Symphony no. 8 in B minor, D 759, "Incomplete"

Carlos Kleiber – Wiener Philharmoniker

"Spirto Gentil" no. 2, Deutsche Grammophon

■ INTRODUCTION

Julián Carrón

We have all arrived here more or less aware of having come out of a desire, an expectation, a longing for something to happen in our lives, which will renew them, which will give them a new start if they have stopped, and overcome the skepticism that worms its way into us and paralyzes us, bringing us a breath of fresh air that will free us from suffocating within our circumstances.

We know well that the only one who has introduced this novelty into history is Christ. We all come here motivated by the hope that He awakened in us one day, in you, in me, that thrill that we felt that shook us up and that we still feel inside ever since the day it happened to us. But how many aspects of our personalities, of our lives, are still waiting to be changed by Him!

And so let us invoke the Holy Spirit, so that Christ may penetrate every fiber of our being more and more deeply, that He may make us share more and more in the act of being moved by Being that the Mystery ("The source of being is in You") has deigned to share with us.

Come Down Holy Spirit

We begin by reading the telegram the Holy Father has sent to us:

"On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme 'Can a man be born again, once he is old?' the Supreme Pontiff turns his affectionate thoughts to the participants and, while he wishes that this blessed encounter may inspire renewed fidelity to Christ, the only source of hope for an enthusiastic evangelical witness, he invokes a generous outpouring of heavenly enlightenment and sends you and the responsables of the Fraternity and all those gathered a special apostolic blessing. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State for His Holiness."

I greet each one of you and all our friends who are connected to us in many countries.

Christ is risen! This is the announcement that for centuries the Church tirelessly makes to us. This is the event that dominates history, an event that no mistake of ours or of our brothers can erase, and that all the evil that could ever occur cannot wipe out. This fact is the reason for our hope; thus it is this fact, His risen presence, which must prevail in us from the first moment of our time together. Any way of looking at our lives, at our feelings about ourselves, at reality or at the world would not correspond to all the factors of reality if it did not begin with this recognition; it would be false, because it would lack the factor which is decisive for the whole of history. There is no greater novelty—there has never been a greater novelty—than the fact that Christ is risen. For this reason, to the degree that we allow ourselves to be totally overrun by this living Presence, to the degree that we allow ourselves to be overpowered by this truth (which is a fact, not a thought created by us, but an event that happened in history), we see the perception we have of ourselves changing.

We come together for these days so that we may live them under the power of this act of being moved, under the wave that is laden with this act of being moved: Christ has died and risen for us. I beg you to leave Him room, that is, to allow us be drawn by this event; let us not allow that only words be left inside us. It has happened: what light, what breath, what hope this fact brings to life! It is the most obvious and powerful sign of the tenderness of the Mystery toward each one of us, of the boundless charity of God for our nothingness (including our betrayal).

It is His victorious presence in our midst that drives us to continue on our journey, seeking to overcome more and more the break between knowing and believing, so that this fact, recognized by faith, may shape our lives more than anything else. On the other hand, if this fact were to remain only at the level of piety or devotion, it would be as if it had never happened, as if it did not possess enough substance of reality to change life, to make a mark on life; and then we would be shaped by everything else, which overwhelms us, which confuses us, which discourages us, which keeps us from breathing, seeing, touching the novelty that the risen Christ has introduced and continues to introduce in our lives.

We began two years ago with faith, which has as its origin (you all remember) “a starting point outside of ourselves,”¹ namely, coming

¹ “This Is the Victory that Conquers the World, Our Faith,” Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, insert in *Traces-Litterae Communionis* 10:6 (June 2008) p. 13.

across an exceptional Presence. Faith is the recognition of this exceptional Presence, made present in the flesh today by witnesses, by the Christian people, by the Church, which would be impossible if He were not constantly bringing it into being. But last year² we went deeper, seeing that in spite of the many outstanding facts we have seen, in spite of many witnesses we have in front of us, it often seems that, after a second, everything vanishes; and we identified the reason for this in that break between knowing and believing which shows itself in the reduction of faith to the projection of a feeling, to ethics, or to a form of religiosity that is foreign to and opposed to knowledge. This is where the reduction lies: faith is no longer conceived of and lived as the path to knowing a reality that is present, and this leaves us weak and confused like everyone else. A faith which is not knowledge, which is not the recognition of a real Presence, does not help life, does not form a basis for hope, does not change the perception we have of ourselves, and does not bring a breath of fresh air into all our circumstances. Furthermore, we identified the crucial aspect of this difficulty as the lack of humanity: “What we are missing today is not the Presence (we are surrounded by signs, by witnesses!); humanity is missing. If humanity is not involved, the path of knowledge stops. Friends, the Presence is not missing; the path is missing,”³ the path that began from curiosity in the face of this Presence, with which we want to enter more and more deeply in a deeper knowledge.

One year later, there are signs that make it clear that the break between knowing and believing has not yet been overcome.

The first sign is that the link between the Christian event and humanity is not understood: they are still seen as extrinsic to one another. Some months ago, faced with my insistence on the work that needed to be done on experience, someone told me that in the beginning the Movement had struck her as an encounter with something objective outside of herself, and so she did not understand why I insisted so much on work at the time. So I had to remind her where we had started from: coming across something present, after which everything vanished. If this difficulty is still here, it means that we have not understood the relationship between the Christian event and the mobilization of the “I,” that

² He is referring to the Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, entitled “From Faith, the Method,” Rimini, April 24–26, 2009.

³ “From Faith, the Method,” Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, insert in *Traces-Litterae Communionis* 11:6 (June 2009) p. 21.

the sign that I have had an encounter is that I get to work, because my humanity has been awakened. Work is the clearest sign that Christianity is an event, that is, that something happens in me that wakes me up.

The second sign is that the event of Christianity is not producing a new mentality. This summer I had the chance to listen to some of our friends abroad who were talking about how it's clear, when faced with certain facts, that the original mentality is more dominant, stronger than the mentality that comes from the encounter. Faced with the events of life and of the world, the reaction many of us have is more in line with the mentality of everyone else than with the mentality expressed by the charisma of the Movement. Having had the opportunity to visit many communities throughout the world this year, I saw this everywhere.

It's as if we are seeing the effects of what Charles Péguy so provocatively describes happening in us: "For the first time since Jesus, we have seen, under our very eyes, we have just seen a new world arise, if not a city; a new society formed, if not a city; modern society, the modern world; a world, a society, constituted, or at any rate assembled, (born) and grow, after Jesus and without Jesus. And what is more, my friend, and it cannot be denied, it has succeeded... That is what puts you in a uniquely tragic position. You are the first. You are the first moderns."⁴ After Jesus, without Jesus. We are dealing with not just a progressive distancing from religious practice: the sign *par excellence* of the marginalization of Christ from life is the shriveling of the dimensions proper to humanity, a reduced understanding of one's own humanity, of one's perception of self, a reductive use of reason, affection, and freedom, a censoring of the scope of desire. Many years ago, Giussani used the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl as a metaphor for what has produced this alteration in men's souls: "Structurally speaking, the organism is as it was before, but not so dynamically speaking. It's something like a physiological falsehood."⁵

And so I was wondering: Is Christianity able to strike at the hard core of our mentality, or is it only able to decorate, to add something pious, moralistic, or organizational to an "I" that is already perfectly constituted, immune to all interference? So during this past year what often came to mind was the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus,

⁴ Charles Péguy, *Temporal and Eternal*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958) p. 131.

⁵ Luigi Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987) [The "I" Is Reborn in an Encounter]* (Milan: BUR) p. 181.

from which we draw the title of our Exercises: “Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do, unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’”⁶ Is the new creature, something really new, possible in this situation of ours? In my opinion, this is the greatest challenge that Christianity is facing now: whether, in the way it has persuasively reached us, namely, the Movement, it is able to pierce the crust of the way everyone stays within reality, or whether it is condemned to remain outside, in the end just something added on. If there is no change in the way of perceiving, of 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.” For us, too, faith can be one among several things, tacked on, placed alongside, living along with the way of seeing and feeling that everyone else has. Years ago, Father Giussani said (you can read it in the book of the CLU équipes which has just been published), “The whole argument of our faith position can be traced back exactly to the breakdown of this ‘placing alongside,’ because Christ, the event of Christianity ... impacts and penetrates everything.” Without the breakdown of this position, we will not be able to perceive the relevance of the faith to the demands of life.

Each one of us can judge this year’s work and verify how far this novelty has entered at the root of our own “I.” What novelty has it brought? It’s not an idea we have, or a matter of opinion, of interpretation: if Christ has entered as something new at the root of our “I” and if He shapes everything in a new way, we carry Him with us in our way of living in reality. I saw many signs of this throughout the year, in many of our communities. (At the same time, there is still a lot of work to do, as we can all acknowledge from our experience.) All these positive signs have a common denominator: people committed to following the proposal that has been made to us. But for many, the question still comes up, “What is the work we’re supposed to do?” In fact, it often happens that each individual fills in the word “work” with whatever he imagines.

⁶ *John* 3:1–4.

⁷ Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986–1987)* [*The “I” Is Reborn in an Encounter*] p. 41.

This is why we want to continue to clarify what it means that humanity is missing. This year, I had to give some lessons on *The Religious Sense* to the Memores Domini novices, and since I was being influenced by the work we are doing together, I was struck by the way I reread some of the chapters, not in the same way that I had often done before, that is, as a part of the journey toward faith; this time I read them from within faith. And so I will comment on a few of the chapters of *The Religious Sense* in order to help us understand how Father Giussani guides us along the path we are following.

But first we have to face head on the objection I was mentioning earlier, namely, that event and work always seem to us to be at odds. This is an example of the distance I sometimes observe between our intention to follow Father Giussani and truly following him. Look at what he says to everyone who sets Christianity and work at odds with one another: “Jesus Christ did not come into the world as a substitute for human effort [this affirmation alone would suffice], human freedom, or to eliminate human trial—the existential condition of freedom. He came into the world to call man back to the depths of all questions, to his own fundamental structure, and to his own real situation. If certain basic values are not safeguarded, all the problems man is called to resolve in the trial of life do not dissolve, but rather become more complicated. Jesus Christ came to call man back to true religiosity, without which every claim to a solution of those problems is a lie. The problem of the knowledge of the meaning of things (truth), making use of things (work), [perfected] awareness (love), human co-existence (society and politics) lack a proper formulation and so, to the extent that religiosity is not at the foundation of the search for their solution, they generate ever greater confusion in the history of the individual and humanity as a whole. (‘Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life...’) It is not the task of Jesus to resolve all the various problems, but to [call] man back to the position where he can more correctly try to resolve them. This toil is a rightful part of every individual’s commitment, whose function in existing lies precisely in that search for solutions.”⁸

He also says, “Insistence on religiosity is the first and absolute duty of the educator, that is to say, the friend, he who loves and seeks to help humanity along the pathway toward its destiny. And humanity’s only

⁸ Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* (Montreal: McGill–Queens, 1998) pp. 97–98.

point of origin is in the individual, the person. This insistence constitutes the entire calling of Jesus Christ. We cannot even think of understanding Christianity unless we begin with its origins as a passion for the individual [person].”⁹

And if this were not clear enough, Father Giussani observes that the Church’s task is the same: “The Church’s direct task, then, is not to provide man with solutions to the problems he encounters on his way. Rather, as we have seen, its proclaimed function in history is to educate us to the religious sense. This implies the appeal for man to adopt the right attitude to reality and the questions it poses, an attitude which constitutes the best condition that man can have for finding more adequate answers to those questions. We have also emphasized that the spectrum of human problems could never be removed from the realm of man’s freedom and creativity. It is not the Church’s task to provide him with a prepackaged solution.”¹⁰

This is why the greatest homage we can pay to Father Giussani five years after his death is our following—not only our intentions, but real following. In this way, we will be able to see that five years after his death, he continues to be a father to us, more than ever, and if we make ourselves truly open to it, he will continue to beget us.

A gesture of this size will not be able to go on without each of us contributing his sacrifice of paying attention to the announcements, to silence, to the directions; this sacrifice is the way we ask Christ to have pity on our nothingness, that He not allow us to fall back into nothingness again in these days. It’s about the possibility of creating an adequate climate of silence so that the seed that we plant today, when we listen to something, will not fall on the footpath, where it will not find enough soil to sprout. Without silence, everything is whisked away in half a minute. I am always impressed that silence arises precisely from this event: His word fills me with silence. Silence is not only a way of keeping order; it is the only adequate response to the event.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 87.

¹⁰ Giussani, *Why the Church?* (Montreal: McGill–Queens, 2001) pp. 155–156.

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF FATHER MICHELE BERCHI

Faced with Jesus' provocation, we can be here this evening and this weekend with the same position that Saul had, that Paul had: "Who are You, Lord?" We can allow ourselves to be unsaddled from our presumptions, from our distraction or our cynicism, and let Someone take us by the hand, as Saul did, and lead us so that our eyes will be opened to Him, to Him whom we have all met already on our path; or we can be here with the same position that the Jews had, full of acrimony and bitterness.

You are the one who decides how to stand in front of the Lord, who is saying to you, "You are hungering for Me; your whole life is hungering and thirsting for Me. Do not be contented; do not be contented even by the miracle that your eyes have seen." This is what He said to those who saw Him multiplying the loaves; this is what He is saying to us again tonight: "Do not content yourselves even with the splendor of this gesture, with the miracle that is this gesture. You are hungering for Me, for My living presence. The manna in the desert was not enough for your fathers; the multiplication of loaves was not enough: your fathers died," just as this gesture is not enough for us to live. "If this gesture does not lead you to Me," the Lord is telling us this evening, "it's worthless."

Our only real danger is to be here, desiring less than this, less than Him, trying to content ourselves with less than everything, that "everything" that You are, O Lord, for us, that "everything" that is greater than we can imagine, that sea of mercy for me that is You, Lord.

Let us ask the Blessed Virgin to help us to change our position, if we need to change it, so that we will never content ourselves, especially in these three days, with anything less than her Son.

Saturday morning, April 24

*Before the introduction and after the conclusion:
Franz Schubert, Sonata for Arpeggione and Piano, D 821
Mstislav Rostropovich, cello – Benjamin Britten, piano
“Spirto Gentil” no. 18, Decca*

Father Pino: “Jesus Christ did not come into the world to take the place of human work or human freedom, or to eliminate the human struggle. He came into the world to call man back to the basis of all his questions, to his basic structure and to his real situation.”

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ FIRST MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

Only the divine can save man

We have a clear goal: overcoming the break between knowing and believing, in order to be able to base our lives on something true and real, allowing us to live everything in a new way. Because of all we have said, reaching this goal requires overcoming the lack of humanity.

1. The provocation of reality

What sets humanity in motion? “If I were to open my eyes for the first time in this instant, emerging from my mother’s womb, I would be overpowered by the wonder and awe of things as a ‘presence.’”¹¹ Father Giussani explains, “First of all, it is clear that the awe which we have described constitutes an *experience of provocation*. Upon gazing at reality, I have before me something which produces [a provocation to] openness. Reality presents itself to me in a way that solicits me to pursue something else. [Since reality inspires this opening in me, it

¹¹ Giussani, *The Religious Sense* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s, 1997) p. 100.

educates me, not with a speech, not with a commandment, not with an appeal to morality, but by provoking me: this is the contribution that reality makes, to help my ‘I’ open up, constantly throwing itself wide open to totality.] I do not react to reality as a photographic film upon which reality ‘impresses’ its image and that’s that. Not only does reality make an impression upon me, it also moves me and solicits me to engage in a search for some other thing, something beyond immediate appearances. It latches on to my consciousness, enabling it to pre-sense and perceive something else.”¹² Let’s imagine that I come to give a lesson to the students, bringing along an electronic device that they have never seen before and that, when I try to plug it in to the outlet to start using it, I realize that I’ve forgotten the cord in the faculty room. What will happen if I leave the classroom to go and fetch the cord? For anyone who’s been a teacher, it’s not hard to guess: everyone will get up and gather around the device to see what it is. If anyone doesn’t get up, just to show that he’s not like everyone else, it will take him more energy to resist his curiosity than it would to go along with the invitation being made by the presence of the device. Maria Zambrano says, “Man will not turn to reality in order to know it, well or poorly, unless first, and as a starting point, he senses it as a promise, like a homeland from which in principle he expects everything, where he believes he can find everything.”¹³

This is why, “[f]aced with the sea, the earth, the sky, and all things moving within them, I am not impassive—I am animated, moved, and touched by what I see. And this motion is toward a search for something else.”¹⁴ Animated, moved, and touched: “I am entirely perturbed by this relationship with the real, pushed beyond the immediate.”¹⁵

If reality has this capacity to grasp the “I” and to move it in this way, imagine what strength the exceptional Presence will have over the “I,” laden with an attractiveness that so corresponds to the heart that it provokes an attachment like no other! Because with Christianity there is the same dynamism as there is with reality, but even more enhanced, because it’s right here that it is fulfilled to the highest degree. “That day, their hearts [those of John and Andrew] came across a presence that unexpectedly and plainly corresponded to the desire for truth, for beau-

¹² *Ibid.* p. 110.

¹³ Maria Zambrano, *Los Bienaventurados* (Madrid: Siruela, 2004) p. 100.

¹⁴ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 110.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

ty, for justice, a desire which made up their simple and unpretentious humanity. From then on, even though they betrayed and misunderstood Him a thousand times, they would never have abandoned Him, having become ‘His.’”¹⁶ It is the same experience that Father Giussani bore witness to in Saint Peter’s Square in 1998: “Only Christ takes my humanity so completely to heart. This is the wonder expressed by Dionysius the Areopagite (5th century): ‘Who could ever speak to us of the love that Christ has for man, overflowing with peace?’ I’ve been repeating these words to myself for more than fifty years! ... It was a simplicity of heart that made me feel and recognize Christ as exceptional, with that certain immediacy as happens with the unassailable and indestructible evidence of factors and moments of reality, which, on entering the horizon of our person, pierces us to the heart.”¹⁷

Why does the encounter have this grip on the “I”? “An encounter with an objective fact which has an origin independent of the person ... [makes the human gaze commensurate] to the exceptional reality to which [it] attracts him. We call this *the grace of faith*.”¹⁸ And why does this exceptional reality grasp the “I” so powerfully, exalting its capacity for knowledge? Because of “[a]n awareness of the correspondence between the meaning of the Fact that we encounter and the meaning of our own existence [the needs that make up the “I”].”¹⁹ This is why the experience of Christianity exalts reason and freedom to the maximum and sets the whole “I” in motion more than any other thing, precisely because, as Edith Stein says, “*by the very fact that I grasp it, it takes hold of me in my personal center, and I hang on to it.*”²⁰

2. The sign

What dynamism begets this act of being so powerfully grasped in the relationship with reality in the “I”? “What do we call something which is seen and touched, which moves me toward something else when I see

¹⁶ Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1995) p. 14.

¹⁷ Giussani, “In the Simplicity of My Heart I Have Gladly Given You Everything,” testimony given in Rome, 1998, <http://www.clonline.org/storiatext/eng/docum/gius1.htm>.

¹⁸ Giussani, *The Risk of Education* (New York: Crossroad, 2001) pp. 101–102.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 102.

²⁰ Edith Stein, *Welt und Person: Beitrag zum christlichen Wahrheitsstreben, Edith Steins Werke*, vol. 6 (Leuven, Belgium: E. Nauwelaerts, 1962) p. 188.

and touch it? It is called a sign... The sign is nature's method of drawing us on to something other than itself: the method of the sign."²¹ Not a speech, not a commandment, but a reality that moves me, stirs me, provokes me, drives me. And here, already, is the great correction that Father Giussani gives us: our thoughts and our plans do not count; what counts is being loyal to reality. We can begin to identify where humanity starts to go missing: when we give in to the temptation to stop this movement. And Father Giussani gives some examples to make it easy for us to understand what he means: "It would not be rational, that is to say, in keeping with a human being's nature, to deny the existence of something else, any more than it would be reasonable to limit the meaning of a sign at a crossroads to a mere pole with an arrow on it. This definition of that object is inadequate, unreasonable that is, not in keeping with the human energy meeting that pole and that arrow—penetrating no further than its immediate appearance and, humanly speaking, an inadequate way to understand it."²² He says the same thing about the impact that a gift of flowers provokes: "Indeed, to refuse the invitation contained in the vase of flowers to ask where they came from would not be a human way of looking at them. The presence of the vase of flowers is, indeed, a sign of something else."²³ This happens with all of reality: "By analogy, it would not be human to deal with the reality of the world by stifling the human capacity to delve ever more deeply into this search for something else, because, as human beings, we are invited by the presence of things to engage in this search. This would be [pay attention!], as we have already said, the positivist position: the total blocking out of the human."²⁴ This is the absence of humanity: the total blocking out of humanity!

How does Christ meet us, not to take our place, but to help us? "For the Christian imbued through and through with the awareness of Christ's presence, for the new man, all things are new creation [everything is a sign]. The Gospel gives us discreet glimpses of the way Jesus looked at nature: when he showed the disciples the flowers of the field, the birds in the sky, the fig trees and vines of his earth, the view of the city he loved. In him, the awareness of the bond between the focus of his gaze and destiny, the Father, was immediately transparent. In him,

²¹ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 111.

²² *Ibid.* p. 112.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

all things sprang from the Father's act of creation, and so they were miracles each time. In the same way, the more we live our faith in the presence of Christ in the Church, the more the signs of God will strike wonder in us, even in the most veiled circumstance, even when we are thinking our inmost thoughts. So there is no need for a special 'shock' to remind us of the great origin that constitutes life. An instant's normality is enough. In focusing on a particular point, the eye is designed to take in the whole spectrum and only in this way may the original point be placed in its proper perspective. Similarly, the religious dimension is designed so that it too 'takes in the whole spectrum.' [This is why Christ came: to reawaken the religious sense]. We often live our lives without this all-embracing vision, as if we had defective sight which reduced the scope of our gaze. Yet, the source of aesthetics, of the ethos, of what is true is totality."²⁵

What would life be like, my friends, if every moment, down to the most hidden, were filled with this intensity?! This is why we need Someone to free us from this flaw that reduces the scope of our gaze: Christ came precisely to free us from this flaw, opening us up to totality. How? By gluing us to Himself, bringing out all our affection, all our freedom and all our reason. "The Christian faith is born as a personal attachment to this encounter. Romano Guardini writes, on his most beautiful page, that 'a certain analogy of this situation is felt by one for whom some person takes on an essential significance; this can happen in such a powerful way that the whole world, destiny, duty, are made active through a beloved: she is as it were contained in everything, everything reminds him of her, she gives meaning to everything... In the experience of a great love, everything comes together; in the "I-thou" experience everything that happens becomes an event within that relationship."²⁶ Event: everything is an event because I relate with everything through being moved by the beloved, and then everything starts to speak to me, to surprise me, as Abraham Heschel says: "We do not come upon [mystery] only at the climax of thinking or in observing strange, extraordinary facts but in the startling fact that there are facts at all"²⁷—facts that used to be taken for granted and now begin to surprise us: and life is an entirely new thing, with the same factors.

²⁵ Giussani, *Why the Church?*, p. 222.

²⁶ Giussani, "Comunione e Liberazione oggi" ["Communion and Liberation Today"], *Quaderni Mazziani* 1 (1986): p. 40.

²⁷ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955) p. 57.

This is why He came: to help us. But we can resist Him, as Jesus warns in the Gospel: “He also said to the multitudes, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, “A shower is coming,” and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, “There will be scorching heat,” and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?’”²⁸ Why is it that they do not recognize the facts and signs that He puts in front of them? It’s not because they are fools. The accusation of hypocrisy is appropriate because the people have sufficient intelligence to recognize the signs of the weather (the cloud and the south wind), so they should also be able to recognize the signs of God’s action. We have no excuse for this! If we’re not doing it, it’s not because we’re incapable, but because we are unwilling to do it.

3. “Can a man be born again, once he is old?”

It is when faced with this unwillingness of ours that the question often occurs to us: After everything that has happened and continues to happen to us, is it possible? Can a man be born again, once he is old? This was the question of Nicodemus, who realizes from the signs that Jesus comes from God. But from His comment on Nicodemus’ words, it is clear that Jesus has completely understood where the difficulty lies: if a person does not allow himself to be begotten by what he recognizes, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This is the same prerequisite that we see being pointed out in the Gospel of Matthew: “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”²⁹

The question being posed is clear: is the rebirth of the “I” possible, the complete activation of man in the dynamics of relationship with reality and with himself (which is otherwise blocked, shriveled, disfigured)? If Christianity does not affect this depth of the subject’s life, it means that it is not an event in man’s life; if it is an event, it establishes a difference at the source of the “I,” which shows itself first of all in the way of looking at, of relating to reality. This is where all the reasonableness, all the usefulness, all the relevance that the faith has to life come into play. If, in fact, faith does not produce a change capable of reaching the root of the “I,” it is worthless.

²⁸ Luke 12:54–56.

²⁹ Matthew 18:3.

Jesus' answer to Nicodemus' question is explicit: man cannot be reborn by himself; it is impossible. He can be reborn, he can be begotten a second time only from on high, from the Spirit. It is significant that the verbs here in the Greek text are all in the passive voice: being begotten is the work of Someone else; it is a grace.

The Gospel episode continues, "Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can this be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.'"³⁰ Here we see the entire dialectic between reason and freedom in action in front of Jesus. Morality plays out in earthly things, in signs, in miracles, in facts that occur, that is, in the attitude one takes when faced with a word or a deed of Jesus, just like the one that is taken when faced with signs in the sky that suggest that it will rain tomorrow.

The "heavenly things," through the dynamism of the Incarnation, have become the "earthly things" that we can touch with our hands, as Saint John says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."³¹ In reality, only one person knows the things of heaven, and it is He who has come down from heaven, Jesus. Therefore, the discernment of the things of heaven passes through the attitude that one takes when faced with these earthly things, namely, the signs and words of Jesus. But this is why one must be open: if one is not born of water and the Spirit, it is not possible for him to be born again. Here we find a clear reference to Baptism, when this rebirth began for each one of us.

The work of the Spirit is not finished in the gesture of Baptism and the other sacraments; it continues to work in our lives. How? John Paul II said it in a definitive way when he met the priests of the Movement in 1985:

³⁰ *John* 3:9–15.

³¹ *1 John* 1:1–3.

“[Sacramental grace] finds ... its expressive form, its operative modality, its concrete historical influence, through the diverse charisms that characterize a personal temperament and history.”³² Therefore, this action of the Spirit continues to reach us today through the charism, through what the Spirit accomplishes in front of us, constantly challenging us. It is in our response to what He is doing that we can see our willingness or lack thereof to follow, to let ourselves be begotten, to let ourselves be educated.

4. The human being at work

Man’s impact with reality, Father Giussani affirms, makes us discover that “the structure of the existential experience is *need*.”³³ Reality makes all those needs of which I am made come forth: truth, justice, love, happiness. We can sum up these needs in the great question, “*Quid animo satis?*”³⁴ “Man has not given himself the taste for the infinite and the love of what is immortal. These sublime instincts do not arise from a caprice of the will; they have their unchanging foundation in his nature; they exist despite his efforts. He can hinder and deform them, but not destroy them.”³⁵

And once again we can say that, if it is proper to reality to be able to kindle those needs that make us up, there is no reality that kindles them as powerfully and raises them to the surface as clearly as the Christian Fact. Father Giussani writes that “the person finds himself again in a living encounter, that is, in a presence [of a person or a group] he comes across and which releases an attractiveness..., that is, it provokes us to acknowledge the fact that our hearts, with what they are made of, with the needs that make them up, are there, that they exist.”³⁶ No other thing brings the needs that make up the heart to the fore like the encounter.

Christianity is an event that brings about the rebirth of the “I” in this way, that is, it brings all our needs to the fore, and we must see this from the way we relate to reality; each of us can verify it in the way he is moved

³² John Paul II, “To Priests of the Communion and Liberation Movement,” speech given September 12, 1985, Castel Gandolfo, Italy, in *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, October 14, 1985, p. 11.

³³ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 113.

³⁴ Latin: “What can satisfy the soul?” Cf. Agostino Gemelli, *Il Francescanesimo* [*Franciscanism*] (Milan: Edizioni O.R., 1932) chapter 13.

³⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010) p. 940.

³⁶ Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [*The “I” Is Reborn in an Encounter*], p. 182.

or is not moved when faced with the facts that are filling the newspapers these days, and that caused the Pope to weep in Malta on Sunday. All of us, reading the reports that kept on coming out in the newspapers, felt compelled to come to terms with the cry for justice over the pedophilia affair. Like Eluana's case, this is a public matter that no one can escape and that has forced us to react, to respond to our coworkers or at home or to ourselves. Like it or not, life always brings all our needs to the fore, but in this case the scale of the challenge was even more dramatic, because it implied a challenge to the faith. Each of us can look at how he faced it. This is a circumstance that the Mystery has not spared us; it is an incident that, lived in this manner, has an educational value. Many have been baffled, if not, in fact, at a loss. One person wrote to me, "I cannot stand in front of this issue." And another, "Faced with the scandalous provocation of this affair, we felt somewhat tempted to conform with everyone else in being scandalized, while of course immediately understanding how much manipulation there was in this whole affair." Life challenges us! For me, first of all, it was a challenge to face this affair, which put me to work; and I am more and more glad that I have been spared nothing and that I must face the same issues as everyone else, because this is the opportunity for me to verify the faith and to grow in coming to terms with everything that happens. And the outcome of this was the article published in *La Repubblica*: I began by recognizing, "None of us has ever been as dismayed as we are in front of the heart-wrenching story of child abuse. Our dismay arises from our inability to respond to the demand for justice which springs from the bottom of our hearts. The request to assume responsibility, the acknowledgement of the evil committed, the reprimand for the mistakes made in the handling of the affair—all of this seems to us to be totally inadequate as we face this sea of evil. Nothing seems to be enough... This has all served the purpose of making us stand face to face with our demand for justice, acknowledging that it is limitless, bottomless—as deep as the wound itself. Since it is infinite, it can never be satisfied. [This is our need for justice, which is equal to that of everyone else, and so we must share the same cry with others.] ... From this point of view, the ones who committed the abuse are paradoxically facing a challenge similar to that of the victims: nothing can repair the damage that has been done. This in no way means that their responsibility can be lifted, and much less the verdict that justice may impose upon them."³⁷

³⁷ Julián Carrón, "Feriti, torniamo a Cristo," *La Repubblica*, April 4, 2010, pp. 1, 7. (English text "Let Us Return, Wounded, to Christ," in *Traces-Litterae Communionis* 12:4 (2010) pp. 1–2.)

It won't even be enough for them to serve the full sentence, as Marino said, who is incarcerated at Padua and who took part in the Way of the Cross: "Paying for your crime doesn't only mean serving a sentence day after day for as many years as you have left to live; it also means living with a weight on your conscience that the passage of time cannot lighten, because it is new every day and it follows you at night. [Here is the cry for justice.] As far as I'm concerned, it's as if I were never alone; I have the sense of living with the person whose death I contributed to during a robbery attempt." All of us have felt all the crushing disproportion, the whole of our powerlessness in the face of this demand for justice that we felt burning inside us; but how many people have come to terms with its infinity, that is, with the sign that the very phenomenon of the need constitutes? This is where we see different uses of reason: the alternative between fidelity to the original dynamism of reason in front of reality and the betrayal of reason, the assassination of what is human, the lack of humanity.

Father Giussani warns us, "Any outlook on the continuous impact between man's awareness and reality which would stifle the dynamic of the sign and arrest the reference to something else which constitutes the heart of the human experience, would murder what is human [take a look at what he is saying], unduly frustrate the impetus of a living dynamism."³⁸ Stifling, arresting, frustrating: these are verbs that always point to the lack of humanity. The problem, then, is to learn where I stop, where I arrest myself, in order to get back on the road.

Why do we stop? Why do we stop the urgent need, the demand? For two reasons: either because of preconceptions, that is, by reducing the need to our own framework (because in this way, besides being able to keep on accusing the Pope, who is the only one who is facing it in a true way, we avoid coming to terms with our own powerlessness to bring about true justice), or because of powerlessness, that is, because of the inability to continue to face this need (feeling a sort of loneliness, which is nothing but inability to face reality).

5. Christ here and now

So what makes it possible to face the need in its fullness without giving in?

³⁸ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 115.

The Pope bore witness to the answer to this question with his letter and with his deeds. What made it possible for the Pope to face the need for justice in its fullness that he felt, tackling it with courage and determination? “Benedict XVI’s recognition of the true nature of our need, of our struggle, is the only way to save our full demand for justice; it is the only way to take it seriously, to take it fully into consideration. ‘The demand for justice is a need that is proper to man, proper to the person. Without the possibility of something beyond, of an answer that lies beyond the existential modalities that we can experience, justice is impossible... If the hypothesis of a “beyond” were eliminated, that demand would be unnaturally suffocated’ (Father Giussani). So how did the Pope save this demand? By calling on the only one who can save it, someone who makes the beyond present in the here and now, namely, Christ, the Mystery made flesh. ‘Jesus Christ ... was Himself a victim of injustice and sin. Like you, He still bears the wounds of His own unjust suffering. He understands the depths of your pain and its enduring effect upon your lives and your relationships, including your relationship with the Church.’”³⁹

Father Giussani explains this very clearly: “Only the divine can ‘save’ man. The true and essential dimensions of humanity and its destiny can only be preserved by [Him] who is their ultimate meaning—which is to say, recognized, acclaimed, defended.”⁴⁰ Only if Christ remains a real experience in the present can we recognize all our needs without being overwhelmed by fright. If it is true that the “I” is born again in an encounter, then we need Christ to be here and now in the present so that we can discover, so that we can continue to face the full nature of the “I.” The method is always the same: it is Something that comes first, not only at the beginning, but at every step of the way. But if the event of Christ is crystallized into a doctrine, if it is reduced to ethics or to spirituality, it is no longer able to awaken man in his fullness, and thus to stand up straight in front of true human needs. Were it not for this passion for Christ, the Pope would be incapable of looking at the situation head on without giving way to fear of the consequences that could follow; he could face it because he is certain, because he is supported by the fullness of the singular presence of Christ, who makes it possible to act in this way. We will be able to face the full need for justice, all the needs of our “I,” without giving in and reducing them to

³⁹ Carrón, “Let Us Return, Wounded, to Christ.”

⁴⁰ Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, p. 83.

the images that can come from the mass media, if, like he, we are supported by a fullness, if we are sustained by the presence of Christ. The experience of Christ now—now!—is essential for breathing fully as a human being. And this is possible only because the Mystery is in the middle of it all. Only the divine can save what is human. So here, too, we can see the relevance of the faith to the demands of life. “Calling on Christ is not a way to seek a hiding place to run off to in the face of the demand for justice: it is the only way to bring justice about.”⁴¹ It is enough to consider, as *Traces* showed,⁴² what the prisoners of Padua wrote, or how people who have suffered injustice (think of the Coletta widow, or Gemma Calabresi [both of whom lost their husbands to violence]) have been able to stand in the face of this need for justice.

To paraphrase Saint Paul, we can say that, after the fall, the gift of grace is not only a restoration of justice, but an overflow: “Law came in to make us completely aware of the fall; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”⁴³ Someone asked me, “For ten days now, I’ve been looking at this article [from *La Repubblica*], and I want to know, where does this judgment come from?” The answer is simple: this judgment comes from following the charism. We have someone in front of us to follow, who taught us to let the facts throw us wide open in order to broaden reason. In every moment, I see myself becoming more and more strongly and consciously thankful to Father Giussani. God had pity on us by letting us meet him, because he bore witness to and pointed out to us a path that each one of us can choose to follow or not.

It is possible for a man to be born again, once he is old, if he is willing to let himself be begotten by the power of the Spirit, who reaches us in a special way through the grace of the charism, without reducing it to our own framework or our own image. This is Christ here and now for us; He is the only one who enables us to face reality as men. This is a journey that came to a stop in our European culture centuries ago, because many people thought they could fend for themselves, believing that the contribution of Christian tradition was something extrinsic, that it imposed a useless distraction upon reason. (I cannot develop this point further at this time.)

⁴¹ Carrón, “Let Us Return, Wounded, to Christ.”

⁴² Cf. *Traces-Litterae Communionis* 12:4 (May 2010) pp. 18 ff.

⁴³ *Romans* 5:20–21.

I wish to emphasize two crucial corollaries:

a) Need for justice and the reasonableness of faith

It is only by taking the full need for justice seriously that I understand the reasonableness of faith, because it is to this unreduced need for justice that only Christ can respond. If, on the other hand, it is reduced, I do not need Christ, because then I think I can fulfill justice with my own hands. (But then we can't cope with life when it gets hard.) So only someone who faces the full need for justice head on can grasp the relevance that faith has to life's needs; but whoever reduces this need, whether out of fear or preconceptions, will inevitably think of faith as something tacked on, not realizing that it is existentially necessary.

b) The cultural dignity of faith

If we do not follow such a path, we cannot present a different and original face to society, and so we are like everyone else; we react like everyone else according to the same criteria that everyone else has. The original mentality is then more influential than the mentality that is born of the encounter that we have had, and this makes us useless and superfluous, doomed to disappear over time. Cardinal Angelo Scola recently recalled one of Giussani's convictions and commented on it: "It then became clear to me that a tradition, or more generally a human experience, can only challenge history, can only subsist in the stream of time, insofar as it comes to express itself and communicate itself in ways that have a cultural dignity.' But this cultural dignity is impossible, unless it starts from the experience of a subject, both personal and communal, easily identified in its ideal traits but fixed within history, which proposes itself to man with simplicity and without complications *by virtue of* its intrinsic reasons [not power]. Such a subject is not afraid of all-out engagement."⁴⁴

This is why we have to overcome this dualism, as one of you recounts: "The other night my wife and I were invited to supper by friends who are just starting to work in the same field that I do. We talked about work. For my part, I gave them a lot of good advice. On the way home in the car, my wife told me that my 'technical advice' (as she defined it) was good, but noted that for the entire course of the evening

⁴⁴ Angelo Scola, "La convenienza umana del cristianesimo" ["The Human Advantage of Christianity"], *Il sussidiario.net*, <http://www.ilsussidiario.net/News/Cronaca/2010/2/22/GIUSSANI-1-Scola-la-convenienza-umana-del-cristianesimo/68486/> in *ilsussidiario.net* (February 22, 2010).

we had stayed on the surface, without going to the root of life. The real problem, my wife noted, was the fact that the difficult circumstances at work that our friends had complained about was a chance to verify their faith, but no one around the table seemed to have noticed this. The point is that when my wife uttered the words ‘verification of faith,’ it was like a punch in my stomach; it felt to me like something foreign. I immediately realized that my wife was totally right, but that feeling of estrangement, even though it lasted only a moment, made it obvious to me that in the end what prevails in me is the dualism that you have often spoken to us about in these past few years, which had always been sort of a hazy concept for me—a dualism maybe even hidden under the ashes of devotion, which causes me to pray at the beginning and end of the day and maybe even during the day, but in the end faith is just a matter of willpower where what matters is what I am able to accomplish, while God stays only in the background. I know we have been working on this for months, yet I come again to ask you for a hand with this, not only to understand the issues at stake, but because I see the certainty and joy of my wife and my other friends and I want to have the same certainty and joy that I sense comes from a sort of unity, from an attachment to Christ that I do not have.”

The new subject is not dualistic because the change in him concerns his very way of looking at, perceiving, judging, feeling, handling, and dealing with reality (personal, social, cultural, political) and thus the root of the “I.” Faith, my friends, does not run alongside the way that everyone else understands and faces reality (shaped by surroundings, by the preconceptions in vogue, by fashion). It is not an add-on of interior life and ethics to a prepackaged understanding of things. No, faith really becomes a starting point for a new way—that is, a true way—of becoming aware of reality itself. This is the challenge that confronts us: the generation of a subject who is not afraid of all-out engagement—because this is what we want. “I want to have the same certainty and joy that my wife has.” Christianity spreads by envy, and it’s always been this way.

Conclusion: A You who reigns

Therefore, we can be different and original if there is a You who reigns; and this is only possible if we agree to let our affective center

shift. Shifting our affective center means “shifting our affective center from the self to a You—to a You [who works in reality, amazes us and calls us in reality: not spirituality]!—and this frees you and fills you with joy [as our friend said when describing his wife], like the child is full of joy because his mother is with him: his affective center is someone else, and so he is fine; he is in balance. If his mother goes away, his affective center falls back to himself, and his sense of self changes: he cries, he despairs, or he is violent, violent at play [or angry]. This is the real message: the bottom line is a real presence, because Christ is risen.”⁴⁵

This is what Father Giussani reminds us of as he bears witness to the One who reigns in him: “To understand what betrayal is, my friends, we have to think of our own distraction, because it is a betrayal to spend days, weeks, months... what about last night, when did we think of Him? When did we seriously think of Him, 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, it was out of curiosity, analysis, the need for analysis, for research, for clarification... But we need to think 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!); solely in a way that is absolutely, totally detached—a sole desire for the good... so much so that if the other doesn’t respond in kind, the desire for the other’s good is nourished even more!”⁴⁶ You can see why a man of such stature can write “that the first object of man’s charity is called Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷

This is what I see happening more and more often among us. This is the Movement: people in whom the You of Christ reigns. Our companionship is full of testimonies from people in whom this You is reigning. They may escape our attention, but there are very many of them, as I often see when visiting the communities. One of them writes, “I’ll begin by telling you what is happening now. The thing that touches me most is Christ’s goodness toward me, and the fact that He is moved for me even before I am moved. I have no wish to get rid of my desires. I ask for everything and I accept everything in the way that He chooses. There is no situation shaping me today; what shapes me is His kindly gaze even

⁴⁵ Giussani, *Qui e ora [Here and Now]* (Milan: BUR, 2009) p. 80.

⁴⁶ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* vol. 3: *Charity* (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 2009) p. 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 22.

as I face my wife's or my children's illnesses." Another writes, "I feel like I've been reborn: I am glad, and I have a tenderness for myself that I've never had before. My life now has an intensity I have not experienced for a long time. Busy with a thousand things, I was simply no longer aware of, moved by His presence. Truly, one can be born again, once he is old."

Under the influence of being moved in this way, one can love Christ in any circumstance, because without Christ circumstances are impossible to endure. This is why, more and more, we feel the urgency, the thirst for this You about whom the Psalm speaks: "O God, Thou art my God, I seek Thee, / my soul thirsts for Thee; / my flesh faints for Thee, / as in a dry and weary land where no water is."⁴⁸ Why this thirst? Why this desire? Because Your grace is worth more than life, O Christ. This is what we always have to ask for from the Spirit, who always makes Christ present, makes us recognize Him, makes us desire Him as what makes life worth living, getting up in the morning, going to work, or having children.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus; veni per Mariam, and reawaken this desire for Christ in us so that we can know Him more and more, not as a word, but as an experience that we cannot do without, so different does life become, as intensity, as presence to ourselves, to reality, and to the people most dear to us or most distant from us, so that we live everything under the effect of this being moved, under the weight of that being moved that You, O Spirit, share with us in the charity of the Mystery! You are the love that has been poured into our hearts so that we can live this way: the next world present in this world!

The Psalm continues, "So I will bless Thee as long as I live; / I will lift up my hands and call on Thy name."⁴⁹ This is the thankfulness, permeating the whole person, for the novelty that Christ brings. And so "I think of Thee upon my bed, / and meditate on Thee in the watches of the night; / for Thou hast been my help, / and in the shadow of Thy wings I sing for joy. / My soul clings to Thee; / Thy right hand upholds me."⁵⁰ I cling to You with thankfulness: "glue" me more and more to You, O Christ! Being glued to You is what gives me the strength to be in reality with my whole self. You are my strength, not I: being attached to You is my strength.

⁴⁸ *Psalm* 63:1.

⁴⁹ *Psalm* 63:4.

⁵⁰ *Psalm* 63:6–8.

HOLY MASS

Readings for Holy Mass: Acts 9:31–42; Psalm 116; John 6:60–69

HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL ANGELO SCOLA,
PATRIARCH OF VENICE

1. “*God, in the waters of Baptism, You have given new life to those who believe in You.*” This is what we prayed in the Opening Prayer. Within these Spiritual Exercises, in which members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation are taking part in various ways in many countries throughout the world, the Eucharistic action that we are celebrating makes the unique and unrepeatable salvific event of Jesus Christ present. Since saving rebirth can happen only in the present, the beloved person of Christ Jesus, present here and now by the power of His Spirit, is begetting again, is truly saving me, truly saving you here and now. I am, you are, the one who is being begotten again, “the new man Christ spoke of to Nicodemus, the man who is born from on high, that is, from Someone else!” says Father Giussani. And he continues, “We are really dealing with a ‘conception’ of self, with a conception begotten by the recognition and acceptance of Someone else as the attractiveness which makes me up” (cf. *Certi di alcune grandi cose* [*Certain of a Few Great Things*], p. 218).

Father Giussani makes use of the double meaning of the word “conception”: in Baptism every man—each of us has received it—is conceived anew as a son in the Son and from here, for the baptized, a new conception of self has its origin. And Benedict XVI succinctly describes it thus: “*I, but no longer I*: this is the formula of Christian life rooted in Baptism, the formula of the Resurrection within time, the formula”—this is the Christian present, “the Resurrection within time”—“the formula,” insists Benedict XVI, “which makes us new, and if we live in this way, we transform the world” (Homily for Holy Saturday, April 15, 2006). “*I, but no longer I.*”

Dearest friends, I don’t know about you, but for me, even after many years of walking the Christian path, it is impossible not to feel the impact (I was about to say “the havoc”) that these statements rooted in Paul provoke in us, were it not for the ocean of distraction that we are normally swimming in, perhaps even now, at this moment.

Man is conceived as a Christian in Baptism. But especially if he received it as a child, as almost all of us did, Baptism blossoms in a new conception of self and of life when the personal encounter with Christ in the Church occurs for us.

As was said a little while ago by Father Julián, this encounter is due to the grace of the charism that makes the permanent grace of Baptism and of the ecclesial institution persuasive. Venerable John Paul II spelled it out (and here I am using a phrase that has just been quoted, because it is crucial): sacramental grace (objective, indispensable, always permanent), which derives from the sacrament, from the Word of God, and is ultimately guaranteed by the objective authority of the Church; this sacramental and institutional grace, permanently at work, says the Pope, “finds its expressive form, its operative modality, its concrete historical influence, through the diverse charisms that characterize a personal temperament and history” (Speech to priests participating in a course of spiritual exercises promoted by Communion and Liberation, September 12, 1985).

Each of us, every Christian should make the exercise (I am using the word as Saint Ignatius used it in his *Spiritual Exercises*) of rediscovering and treasuring in his own life the exact when and how of this personal encounter and continually go back to it in order to stay faithful to it.

We all know that every grace (this applies to both the sacrament and the charism) cannot be possessed once and for all, cannot be held in our helpless hands like a thing, nor even as just a well-formed doctrine or as a series of carefully tuned behaviors, as one would possess an object. So each of us, here and now, if we are the least bit honest, can see himself in Nicodemus, torn between loyalty and skepticism. Let us think of how many times our framework of the use of reason malignantly reappears—“How can a man be born when he is old?” (*John* 3:4), or when freedom, thickheaded or even fickle, digs in its heels—“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (*John* 6:60). And then, when we fall prey to this skepticism of reason and of will, reality no longer speaks to us; it escapes from us like the light, if we attempt to hold it in our helpless hands.

2. Who will deliver us from this ultimate sadness of life? Only the “faithful witness” (*Revelation* 3:14). This is how the *Book of Revelation* defines Jesus, defines Him and those who follow Him, as we humbly do also, as one follows a presence that becomes the affective center of his whole existence. The charism lives in the historical encounter with the witness, in whom the novelty of the Risen One shines. This is how the possibility of rebirth is given to man, as happened physically for Tabitha, whose name means “gazelle,” who was raised on account of Peter, the witness, as we heard in the first reading.

But the big word “witnessing” must be stripped of every moralistic reduction; it must not be confined to a good example, however neces-

sary a good example may be. Witnessing must be, in all its strength, the method of knowing the truth, because it is the right way for the “I” to relate to reality. Witnessing is the method of knowing the truth because it is the way that truth is communicated, and we know well from experience that a truth is known only when it is communicated. Baptismal rebirth allows the encounter between the whole “I” and all of reality, because it opens up freedom and accompanies it to that good relationship which makes up our whole self above anything else, namely, communion with Someone else (with a capital “s”) that Christ has guaranteed for us, and in Him, communion with all the brothers—with Christ and, in Him, with the brothers. Christianity is truly the new family bond, stronger than that of flesh and blood.

But communion is so “from on high,” it is so much a gift that we resist it in a thousand ways. Hence Jesus’ provocative question in today’s Gospel, “Do you also wish to go away?” is more or less addressed to all of us gathered here. The fact that we came here at the cost of so much sacrifice could, at first glance, exempt us from this question, but ultimately that would be an injustice to our sensitivity, full of reason, that seeks totality. The vitality of the charism, five years after Father Giussani’s death, demands witnesses eager for a successful humanity. The charism presses the freedom of each of the members of Communion and Liberation, like that of Simon Peter, on toward the verification down to the marrow of the advantage of following: the advantage of belonging to Christ and to the Church through the form begotten by the charism of Father Giussani, of the Movement of Communion and Liberation. And what was Peter’s verification? The Gospel presents it to us in all its disarming and obvious strength: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (*John* 6:68–69).

3. How can the man of today, the post-modern man, tempted to seek salvation in the exciting discoveries of the technical sciences in the fields of evolution, biology, and neuroscience, believe in and come to know Christ as the Savior, that is, be reborn from on high, from Someone else, when he frequently considers religious faith to be at best a subjective reality useful for comfort?

The only possibility, even at this current historical juncture, is the encounter with witnesses of a redeemed humanity that is therefore full and advantageous, and therefore well-rooted in post-modernity. We must, however, be clear in this regard.

Living as redeemed men does not mean being flawless. This would be a monstrous presumption. Rather, as Augustine affirmed, it means “loving the new life,” life according to Christ, having “the mind of Christ,” that is, thinking as Christ thinks and thinking of Christ through all things, because we are loved by Him who first loves us: *Deus prior dilexit nos*. Augustine affirms, “We do not love if we are not first loved. . . . Seek in a man his motive for loving God,” he says to his interlocutor, “and you will find nothing other than this: because God loved him first” (*Discourse 34:1–3, 5–6*).

Do you see this? Is this fact your daily experience, that *Deus prior dilexit te*, that He is loving you first? Is this the horizon of your awareness?

A credible witness of this sort can be recognized by the unity of his person. Unity is the factor that the elementary experience of the “I” is founded upon. But the unity of the “I” is formed by good relationships. Beginning with those first relationships with dad and mom, and including all the relationships in which man is reborn, finding each time, even after falling or sinking, that the good plan of the loving and faithful God does not fail, He never ceases responding to the promise of fulfillment (which you must always go back to) awakened by the encounter with Christ in the companionship. This is the phenomenon of authority, of the emergence of holiness, which cannot endure and never endures without the established authority. The established authority is the human figure through whom one can follow with certainty “the plan of the Spirit of God in history and in our lives” (Father Giussani, *Da quale vita nasce Comunione e Liberazione* [*What Kind of Life Gives Birth to Communion and Liberation?*]).

We are speaking of the unity of the “I,” the unity of the Church guided by the Successor of Peter and by the successors of the Apostles, as well as unity with those who, in the vocational companionship arising from the charism one shares, have received the objective responsibility of guidance—unity, therefore, which is not external, not extrinsic, not a formal allegiance, nor even in the final analysis deriving from a well-meaning assessment (since it is obvious that division is never the harbinger of fruitfulness), but unity lived as a lasting and virtuous habit, starting from your heart, your mind, your action. This unity, which starts from the “I” and reaches all the Church’s expressions and, potentially, those of civil society, speaks and makes clear more than anything else the novelty of the redeemed man, and it assures the continuation of the Church in history and of all the charisms in the Church. This is

why unity never (never!) is afraid of correction, however it may arise, because nothing can undermine the fact that unity, as a gift from on high, always goes before us, rallying us.

4. We repeated in the Responsorial Psalm, “What shall I render to the Lord for all His bounty to me?” How can we not see the spectacle of this great assembly, shared by thousands and thousands of other people throughout the world, how can we not see it in view of the great gift, of the great bounty that the Lord has given us? And so, what shall I render, what shall we render? This preference for you, for each of us, shown by the Lord with the gift of faith, Baptism, and with our sharing in the charism of Father Giussani, makes our awareness sharper and our passion more consuming—the same passion that, as the *Acts of the Apostles* shows us, led the first disciples to the streets of the world. In this regard, it is important that we not let what appears to be only a detail in the first reading escape us. Describing the life and the mission of Peter, the *Acts of the Apostles* says, “Now as Peter went here and there among them all...”

In this going “here and there among them all,” the horizon and the nature proper to the mission of the Church and to each of us are expressed. There is no circumstance, whether favorable or not, nor situation or relationship in all of human existence foreign to the gift of the Risen One—nothing and no one, for “all are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (*1 Corinthians* 3:22–23). This is why mission calls for an all-around openness to reality and assigns to each one of us a very precise, personal responsibility. No one can replace you in this task: you are asked, we are asked to take up, as men newly conceived and begotten again and again in the Spirit, the (always concrete and historically situated) personal and communal vocational circumstances, whether favorable or not, made up of time and space, of one’s state in life, of affections, work and rest, of joys and sorrows, of sufferings, of mourning, of death, of the prospect of eternity, of hope and of complex problems. Everything, everything is yours to demonstrate the supreme advantage of spending your own existence “in Christ,” as Paul defines the Christian: he who exists in Christ. Mission plays out in every place and in every moment, and it can never be imagined as the mechanical repetition of formulas or activities. Reflect carefully, my friend: life has been given to you in order to be given. If you do not give it, time will steal it from you.

Unity and mission are the expression of thankfulness to the Lord and to those who have gone before us and accompanied us in following Him—above all, to our beloved Father Giussani.

5. Let us entrust our path, the future, filled with reliable hope, of each of the members of Communion and Liberation and of the whole Movement, to the Blessed Virgin, *Mater Ecclesiae*. She is the mother of believers, of those rising again, of the redeemed, because her *yes* is the source of the transfigured world, the place of life for free men, but free because they are always and newly freed from on high. Amen.

BEFORE THE FINAL BLESSING

Julián Carrón: Your dearest Eminence, I want to thank you very much on behalf of everyone for being willing to share in these Exercises with us. We are always struck by your witness as a caring shepherd of the people entrusted to you and for the courage and intelligence with which you follow the Pope. You—we had a chance to see it again this morning—are the most obvious sign of how the charism of Father Giussani is a life-giving factor for the whole Church and the source of an ever new humanity. We thank you for this, and we ask you to always be close to us. Thanks.

Cardinal Scola: I am the one to express my thankfulness again to all of you, to Father Julián, in the bond of affection with Father Giussani, more and more alive over the passage of time, a witness to and a proof that the communion of saints is stronger than our mere earthly pilgrimage, because it brings the Eternal into time, and therefore it truly leads to a reliable hope. This is how we must live in our post-modern era. It is a time of travail—this is the correct image, rather than “crisis”: by constantly talking about crisis we only end up in paralyzing complaint—and travail is a labor that gives us a foretaste of life, that gives us a foretaste of the joy of life.

Always, ever since it all began in '54, I believe that Father Giussani looked at time this way, thrusting us into the world in Christ, for Christ and with Christ, not with our strength, humble yet bold. Let us take up this time as his sons, but above all as sons of God, as a people who knows it must daily invoke the rebirth from on high.

Thus, let us be witnesses in the concrete fabric of daily life, following the charism in all its strength, the Pope as the guarantor that the charism is living in the institution of the Church, and the bishops in union with him, offering, moment by moment, our lives for the glory of the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Saturday afternoon, April 24

Before the introduction and after the conclusion:
Franz Schubert, *String Quartet in D minor, D810, "Death and the Maiden"*
Amadeus Quartet
"Spirto Gentil" no. 7, *Deutsche Grammophon*

■ SECOND MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3)

We are trying to describe the lack of humanity in order to strike at the break between knowing and believing. Up to this point we have dealt with the factor of reason, of awareness. Now we must face another factor essential to the definition of man: freedom.

1. Through freedom: the whole man

"The human person, as a free being, cannot be fulfilled, cannot reach his destiny except through freedom... If I were forced to reach my destiny, I would not be able to be happy. It would be neither my happiness, nor my destiny."⁵¹ What a unique exaltation of the "I"! In the face of the ever lurking temptation to look for "systems so perfect that no one will need to be good,"⁵² as T.S. Eliot puts it, Giussani exalts the involvement of the "I" in an incredible way. His reason is the same as Plato already gave many centuries ago in one of his dialogues: "'Socrates, what does the lover of goodness want?' – 'To possess it.' – 'What good will it do him to possess it?' – 'That's easier. It will make him happy.' – 'Yes, because those who are happy are happy because they possess what is good. The enquiry seems to have reached a conclusion, and there is no need to ask the further question, "If someone wants to be happy, why does he want to be happy?"' – 'True.' – 'Do you think this wish

⁵¹ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 121.

⁵² T.S. Eliot, "The Rock," *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) p. 159.

and this desire are common to all mankind, and that everyone wants always to possess what is good? Or what do you think?’ – ‘I think it is common to all men.’”⁵³ This desire to possess what is good, that it be mine, is common to all men. But to reach it means loving, adhering, that is, involving our freedom, and sometimes, as we well know, we want to spare ourselves this. It is an ever lurking temptation. Luisa Muraro writes, “We always have the wish to give the responsibility for our lives to someone else; we easily seek someone we can tell, ‘Please take care of my life.’”⁵⁴ And rest assured that there will always be someone so “charitable” that he will be ready to do it...

If somebody wants to look for someone else to spare him his freedom (call him spiritual director, or boss, or friend—it’s all the same), he has to clearly understand that he will not reach happiness in this way, that nothing will ever be his, because I can reach my fulfillment only through my freedom; otherwise, it will never be *my* fulfillment. And if I don’t understand this (and, unfortunately, I often see that many of us don’t), I will always try to unload the drama of my freedom onto someone else. This is the burden that the Grand Inquisitor, in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s famous tale, wishes to take off our backs, as he reproves Christ for the gift of freedom. It’s striking to read it again: “Instead of taking possession of men’s freedom, Thou didst increase it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of mankind with its sufferings for ever. Thou didst desire man’s free love, that he should follow Thee freely, enticed and taken captive by Thee. In place of the rigid ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Thy image before him as his guide. But didst Thou not know he would at last reject even Thy image and Thy truth, if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice?”⁵⁵ It is this burden that the Grand Inquisitor, every Grand Inquisitor, wishes to spare us. His agenda is to relieve man of this unbearable burden, replacing freedom with authority. In this way, mankind would be reduced to a happy flock of sheep, and happiness would be bought at the cost of freedom. But such a happiness will never be mine!

Sometimes we free ourselves of this burden and of bothersome responsibility by casting blame all around (on the circumstances, on oth-

⁵³ Plato, *Symposium*, 204E-205A, trans. Tom Griffith (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000) p. 54.

⁵⁴ Luisa Muraro et al., *Il posto vuoto di Dio [God’s Empty Seat]*, eds. L. Muraro and A. Sbrogiò (Milan: Marietti, 2006) p. 25.

⁵⁵ Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004) p. 236.

ers, on the companionship, on the Fraternity, on whatever you like), but it's useless because (this phrase of Father Giussani has always struck me) "no human achievement can be attributed to mere outside circumstances alone, since man's freedom, albeit made fragile [because of original sin], remains as the indelible mark of God's creature."⁵⁶ This affirmation of man, not reduced to any antecedent factor of biological, psychological, sociological, or any nature, is truly moving. Man's freedom, albeit made fragile, remains as the indelible mark of God's creature: this is our dignity as men! "It is through my freedom that destiny, the end, the goal, the ultimate object becomes an answer given to me [so much so that if I don't risk verifying what I have met through my freedom, I cannot see whether it is an answer to me; I cannot touch, I cannot have the experience that this is an answer to me; and without having direct experience, what is proposed to me will never become mine, but will remain outside me: not that I don't talk about it, not that I don't believe in it, but it's not mine]. Human fulfillment would not be human—would not be fulfillment—if it were not free."⁵⁷ Once again, we have all the signs that allow us to understand when humanity is present and when it is absent.

"Now, if reaching destiny, fulfillment is to be free, freedom must 'play a role' even in its *discovery*, for if the discovery of this destiny, this ultimate meaning were automatic, then this destiny would no longer be mine." This observation of Father Giussani is not to be taken for granted, because we usually think that freedom has to do with the answer only once I have understood, and not with its discovery, too. "The human person is responsible before his destiny; the way he attains it is his responsibility, the fruit of his freedom. Freedom, then, has to do not only with our movement toward God as coherence of our lives, but, even before that, the very discovery of God."⁵⁸ That is, we think that freedom comes into play only after reason has discovered Him, not in the discovery, not in the knowledge, but only in being consistent with respect to the One I have come to know. But, on the contrary (and how crucial this is!), there is no knowledge, if reason and freedom do not come into play at the same time. And so we would like to reach destiny without freedom; we would also like a kind of knowledge that does not require the involvement of freedom.

In this, we are truly modern. Modernity pursues a type of knowledge so certain that it thinks it can acquire it only at the cost of excluding

⁵⁶ Giussani, *Why the Church?*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 121.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

freedom. This is why there is a break between reason and freedom in knowledge: the “moderns” fail to keep reason and freedom together. We too often think that if freedom comes into play, knowledge cannot be certain. To be trustworthy, we think, knowledge has to be free of freedom’s influence. We delude ourselves into thinking that we can know without being involved, staying detached, being the judges of everything. “If one’s attitude toward reality conditions its knowledge and even, to some extent, its effective presence, it is because human freedom is shown here as everywhere ... in being able to say yes or no when faced with reality.”⁵⁹ This is so true that Saint Gregory of Nyssa said that if man “lay aside [his] free-will, [he] loses at the same time [his] privilege of belonging to the intellectual order.”⁶⁰ We have always learned as much from Father Giussani: “There are many scientists who, in deepening their experience as scientists, have discovered God; and there are many others who have thought to evade or eliminate God by means of their experience as scientists. In a similar way, many men and women of letters, through a profound perception of the human person’s existence, have discovered God; and many others, through their attention to the human experience, have evaded or eliminated God. And, there are many philosophers who have arrived at God by means of their reflections; and many others who through their reflections have excluded God. This, then, means that to recognize God is not solely a problem of science, aesthetic sensitivity, or philosophy as such. It is also a matter of freedom. One of the most noted neo-Marxists, Louis Althusser, recognized this when he said that between the existence of God and Marxism the problem is not one of reason, but option.”⁶¹ If freedom does not come into play, there is no knowledge, because, as Nikolai Berdyaev affirms, “[k]nowledge is not an intellectual process only: in knowledge all of man’s powers are engaged, voluntary choice, attraction to, and repulsion from, the truth.”⁶²

What greatness Giussani once again bears witness to in censoring no aspect, none of the factors that make up the “I” (reason and freedom), in affirming one without excluding the other, in trying to make the con-

⁵⁹ Maria Zambrano, *Filosofía y educación [Philosophy and Education]* (Málaga, Spain: Ágora, 2007) p. 35.

⁶⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Catechetical Oration*, trans. J. H. Srawley (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917) p. 91.

⁶¹ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, pp. 121–122.

⁶² Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952) p. 21.

nection between the two understood, since if we take one or the other away, there is no more knowledge!

But all that we have said raises a problem that we have to face: if it's not just a matter of reason, but an option, is any option of freedom equally true? Is it purely arbitrary? Is any option equally reasonable? Do we have to forget or eliminate everything we have said up to this point about reason?

Here the question comes forth, "What is the relationship between freedom and reason in knowledge?" To explain, I will use a mundane example that I used to use with my high school students in Spain. Imagine two people watching a young man who is giving his fiancée something that they know cost one dollar. (There are stores with departments where everything is sold for one dollar.) One says to the other, "Look at that cheapskate: one dollar! That's how much he loves her? One dollar!" The other onlooker responds, "You don't understand anything, because through this object, even if it's worth one dollar, there's something greater happening: he's telling her how much he loves her. The price doesn't matter." But the other one insists, "Stop it! We both saw it in the store; it was worth one dollar! This is what counts; everything else is your cogitations." Which option takes more account of all the factors that are shown by this deed? Does the one who says, "One dollar" (which is in fact true) get it more, or is it the one who, while recognizing the poverty of the gift, is discovering that something more is going on there? Do you see how freedom comes into play in the discovery, and that there is an option? But if we were to directly ask the young man and his fiancée which of the two interpretations better explains what is happening between them, would they recognize the observers' two interpretations as equal? Or is there one that explains what is really happening between them? It is certainly a problem of option, but one option is reasonable and one is unreasonable; one is foreign to the nature of what is happening and the other completely explains it. If I don't allow my reason to be thrown wide open to the point of understanding the full meaning of all the facts, my option is against the evidence of what happens, and I don't get it (so much so that not all interpretations explain things in a true way). So freedom does not act only afterwards; it is already in play at the beginning.

This is the same thing that Father Giussani says with the example of the half-light: "Standing in the half-light, you turn your back to the light and exclaim, 'All is nothing. It is obscure, without sense.' Then, you turn your back to the darkness and say, 'The world is a vestibule of

the light, the beginning of the light.’ The two positions are exclusively a matter of choice. Still, it is true that this is not the whole problem. Of the two positions, the one where the person turns his back to the light and exclaims, ‘All is shadow,’ or where the individual with his back toward the dark, says, ‘We are at the beginning of the light,’ one is right and the other is not. One of the two eliminates an almost imperceptible factor: indeed, if there is half-light, then there is light.”⁶³ One option goes along with nature, and it highlights reason; the other option goes against nature, and it obscures reason. The option is critical.

This dynamism that happens in the face of all of reality happens all the more in the face of the Christian event, which, by reason of the grandeur of its exceptionality, challenges freedom even more. And not all decisions of freedom are equally reasonable. “Now He was casting out a demon that was dumb; when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke, and the people marveled. But some of them said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons’; while others, to test Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”⁶⁴ It’s exactly the same, in the face of the gift as well as in the face of the signs that God is working in our midst! And we all know this is not just a thing of the past, but that it is happening today, now, in the face of the same signs that the Mystery performs in our midst: some give it explanation *x*; others give it explanation *y*. But whatever the explanation, Jesus was casting out demons; whatever the interpretation, the issue is that there would be nothing to discuss if there were no miracles that Jesus is performing. This is why not just any explanation will do, but the one which completely takes account of this fact. In fact, in John’s Gospel Jesus openly reproves them: “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It is to fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause.’”⁶⁵ That is, they chose an option against rea-

⁶³ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 122.

⁶⁴ *Luke* 11:14–20.

⁶⁵ *John* 15:24–25.

son, because they saw the signs and they did not recognize Him. Do you understand, then, how much the drama of freedom is in play now?

At this point Father Giussani makes a statement of genius, which at first is almost hard to believe: “The human person, in fact, in his freedom, affirms what he has already secretly decided in the beginning,”⁶⁶ that is, he has already decided the score of the game before starting; all the signs you like can happen later, but I’ve decided not to be struck. When I first read this sentence I thought, “This is too much!”—that is, until I was teaching one day and was faced with this statement in the flesh. I was about to begin reading the Gospels and I had written the word “Gospels” on the blackboard. I turned around, and a student said to me, “Don’t think that the Gospels can give us any real knowledge of Jesus. They were written by Christians. What true objective knowledge can they give us?!” Then I asked him, “So in your opinion, the most adequate position, the hidden starting point toward reality, is suspicion?” “Of course it’s suspicion. It’s so obvious... Don’t take me for a fool.” “So, according to what you are telling me, when your mom brought you coffee this morning for breakfast, you said, ‘I’m not drinking this until I chemically analyze it to make sure there is no poison in it.’” I still remember the student’s reaction. With an angry face, he threw up his hands and said, “But I’ve lived with my mother for sixteen years!” “Oh! So it’s not always reasonable to begin with suspicion. Then what is the difference between the way you reacted to the word ‘Gospels’ and the way you reacted to the coffee your mom brought you this morning?” But what most impressed me was the second part of the incident, because two weeks later, when he no longer remembered what had happened, I was reading a page of the Gospels in class in order to show all of them what the disciples experienced over the course of a day spent with Jesus. Jesus goes to the synagogue and starts to teach, and they were all amazed because He was teaching them like someone with authority, and not like the scribes; then He heals a man possessed by an unclean spirit; He goes to Peter’s house and heals Simon’s mother-in-law; that evening in the city, He heals many people afflicted with various illnesses; and the next day, early in the morning, He gets up and goes to pray. And I finished by inviting my students to imagine what the people who followed Jesus for days, weeks, and months must have experienced, going through days like this with Him. I asked, “If you had been there, what would you have experienced?” The first one to speak

⁶⁶ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 122.

up was the same student. Do you know what he told me? “I would be careful not to get duped.” So I shot back, “Do you realize you said the same thing two weeks ago?” He hadn’t realized it, and he was stunned, really stunned. That student was living with suspicion about everything. Faced with anything, what came out was the suspicion with which he related to reality. He had already decided, based on a hidden starting point. This is why Father Giussani is right when he affirms, “Freedom does not appear so much in the clamor of the choice. Rather, it is played out in the early, most subtle dawn of consciousness in its impact with the world [that is, in its impact with reality].”⁶⁷

This is why, from the first time I heard it, I have been very struck by this story by Elsa Morante: “[T]here was an SS, who, because of his horrible crimes, one day at dawn, was being led to the gallows. He was only about fifty paces from the place of execution, which was being held in the courtyard of his prison. And as he walked forward, his eye happened to light on the crumbling wall of the yard, where one of those flowers sown by the wind had grown, those flowers that bloom wherever they fall and apparently live on air and rubble. It was a miserable little flower, of four purplish petals and a couple of pale leaves; but in that dawning first light, the SS saw in it, to his amazement, all the beauty and happiness of the universe. And he thought: *If I could go back, and could stop time, I would be willing to spend my whole life adoring that little flower.* Then, as if he had become two persons, he heard inside himself his own voice, but joyful and clear, though distant, coming from some unknown place, shouting at him: *Verily I say unto you: for this last thought you have had on the point of death, you shall be saved from hell!* Telling you all this has taken me a certain amount of time; but there, it lasted only half a second. Between the SS, walking in the midst of the guards, and the flower blooming on the wall, there was still, more or less, the same distance as before: barely a step. ‘No!’ the SS shouted, inside himself, turning back furiously, ‘you can’t fool me, not again, with those old tricks!’ And since his hands were bound, he tore away that little flower with his teeth. Then he dropped it on the ground and trampled it under his feet. And he spat on it.”⁶⁸

In the very first, most subtle dawn of awareness, in an instant, this drama plays out: “And here is the alternative in which man risks himself,

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Elsa Morante, *History: A Novel*, trans. William Weaver (South Royalton, Vermont: Steerforth Press, 2000) pp. 677–678.

even if *almost* unconsciously: either you face reality wide open, loyally, with the bright eyes of a child, calling a spade a spade, embracing its entire presence [that is, of reality as it is given to you], even its meaning; either this, or you place yourself in front of reality, defend yourself against it, almost with your [elbow] in front of your eyes to ward off unwelcomed and unexpected blows. You call reality to the tribunal of your opinion, and then potentially full of objections, having become too shrewd to accept its most gratuitous and surprising evidence [not what isn't clear, but evidence] and suggestions, you admit only what suits you. [When we see this active in us, it is truly pathetic: people who insist that there are no facts, because they are not willing to acknowledge them, not because they're not there.] This is the profound choice we exercise daily before rain or sunshine, [our] father and mother, before our breakfast, cars and buses and the people that ride with us, before our colleagues, school books, teachers, boyfriend, or girlfriend. [Everyone can add to the list.] The decision that I have described is made before reality, before all of it. In making such a decision, it is clear that reasonableness or being wholly human [wholly human!], lies in an openness [without openness, there is no humanity] that calls a spade a spade. It is the attitude of the *poor* in spirit, those who, before reality, have absolutely nothing to defend.”⁶⁹

It is truly striking to read these chapters of *The Religious Sense* again from within our attitude toward the facts, the presences and the witnessings that the Lord gives us. And if this is so critical for being begotten again, then (since we cannot make it by ourselves, but only through what Someone else does in the present, in the “earthly things”), if we are not willing, our rebirth can never come about; not because it can't happen, but because we are not willing, because humanity is missing (because the “wholly human” consists in what is open).

Father Giussani goes on, “If you are ‘moral,’ or another way of putting it, if you remain in the original attitude God gave you by creating you, that is to say, you are open to the real, then you understand, or at least you seek, that is, you ask. If, instead, you are not in that original position, that is to say, if you have been [look, again: the absence of humanity] adulterated, corrupted, stalled by prejudice, then you are ‘immoral,’ and you cannot understand. [The consequence is not that you go to hell or that you're inconsistent. No: it's that you cannot understand!] And this is the supreme drama of human life.”⁷⁰ Everything is at

⁶⁹ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, pp. 122–123.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 123.

stake in this attitude in the face of reality, because since we're not the ones who can reawaken ourselves, who can beget ourselves anew, and we have to allow ourselves to be begotten by Someone else, everything depends on our capacity to be thrown wide open in the face of this. If not, we look through the lens of positivism, like everyone else, and we cannot see clearly.

2. The education to freedom

From here we see how critical the education to freedom is. This is why Father Giussani so insists, "The fundamental problem of the great adventure of this 'sign' which is the world, is education in freedom... If reality refers the human being to something else, then education in freedom and responsibility are identical. Responsibility comes from the word 'to respond.' Education in responsibility is an education in responding to [what is calling]." ⁷¹ And how does it call me? We said it this morning: through the method of the sign, something in reality through which being calls me to respond.

This education to freedom has two factors.

a) *Education to attention*

"First of all, it implies an education in *attention*, for [look at the realism that distinguishes Father Giussani] committed freedom does not necessarily imply attention [again: the lack of humanity] because it is not automatically easy to be attentive [because attention is a strain, an effort, a source of hardship: this is why we must not take it for granted]. Preconception, no matter what its origin [and here, Father Giussani gives us spectacular help: everyone can recognize himself in the various categories], impedes our attention. Preconception can mean the predomination of an interest and this leads to distraction, or the affirmation of a preformed idea and the rejection of a new message. It can also originate in concentrating one's sensitivity upon the pleasurable and thus becoming progressively insensitive toward details or nuances of a proposal, or handling things clumsily, briefly, and in a summary fashion, which becomes a crime when one treats a really serious problem." ⁷² These are all possible situations where the lack of humanity occurs,

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p.125.

⁷² *Ibid.* pp. 125–126.

because the “wholly human” consists in what is open to totality. This is why he insists on how important this relentless emphasis on totality is. Everyone can verify how he faces the signs that the Lord is making happen. How can we keep on saying that, in the end, all the exceptional-ity that we are seeing can find an explanation other than the presence of Christ? How can we keep on saying that His name is tacked on? Only because of an absence of attention or an unwillingness to accept Him.

b) Education to acceptance

This is why Father Giussani points out a second factor, namely, “an education in the capacity for acceptance... An education that forms attentiveness and acceptance ... teaches one to open doors... [Thus it] assures the correct fundamental attitude in front of reality—wide open, free, and without presumption, which calls reality up to face our own verdict, an attitude that does not judge reality on the basis of preconcep-tion. To summarize, educating one’s freedom to attentiveness, that is, to be wide open toward the totality of factors at play, and educating it to acceptance, that is, to the conscious embrace of what it finds before it is the fundamental issue of the human journey.”⁷³ Without educating our-selves to this attention and to this acceptance of something that comes from outside ourselves, we give in.

So, whoever follows what the Lord is making happen before our eyes, blossoms, and whoever does not let himself be begotten by what is happening, rots. We must, then, all train ourselves in this correct attitude in the face of reality, in this original position with which the Mystery has endowed us. And as Father Giussani always said, this education is not something that happens on its own: effort is needed; work is needed.

So the real question is, “How is freedom educated?” By respond-ing to the provocation of reality. If reality provokes, education of our freedom has to be an education to respond to the provocation. It is simple: “It is an education in ‘hungering’ and ‘thirsting’ which makes us attentive to the many solicitations emerging from our confrontation with the totality of the real... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst. [Humanity which has this hunger and this thirst is a grace. In this way, life is a blessing, because I become capable of taking in all of reality.] Contrarily, cursed are those who do not hunger and thirst, who already know, who expect nothing. Cursed are the satisfied for whom reality, at

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 126.

best, is a pure pretext for making a commotion, and who do not expect anything really new from it. [This is the curse.]”⁷⁴ If we still say that we don’t understand what the absence of humanity means, I cannot find a description more striking than the following: “All of these ‘buts, ifs, however, and perhaps,’ are words used to help weaken the positive way the ‘I’ relates to reality. They are a defensive volley of gunfire, a smokescreen protecting a person’s retreat from a commitment to reality itself.”⁷⁵ This is not a reproach; it is so that we have all the elements we need to understand what the work that Father Giussani is proposing to us is about, if we want to really be his children, instead of retreating from being men.

3. The prerequisite for freedom

“Why is it so difficult for man to read that mysterious name suggested, signaled by the entire call to him from the real, to identify the existence of God, of mystery, the meaning that lies beyond himself? Where precisely is the problem?”⁷⁶ The real problem is what Father Giussani calls the experience of risk, which he always identified in that experience he had when he was a boy, while on a rope climb in the mountains, when he had to jump less than a yard with a ravine underneath, but he was scared and he clung, panic-stricken, to an outcrop of rock, overcome with fear. “I understood this concept well when, by chance, many years after the fact, I remembered an episode from my childhood. I was always asking to be taken along on those high dangerous trails that require hikers to climb linked together by a rope. But they always answered me saying, ‘You are too small.’ Then one day they said to me, ‘If you pass your exams next June, we will take you for your first rope climb.’ And so it happened. Ahead of me was the guide, then I, and, following me, were two men. We had climbed beyond the half-way point of the trail when, at a certain moment, I saw the guide make a small jump. Three or four meters behind him, nervously holding the rope in my hand, I heard the guide say, ‘All right now, jump!’ I found myself on a ledge with another one commencing about a meter beyond it, and beneath me was a deep ravine. I leapt back and grabbed onto a large outcropping of rock. Three grown men were

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 126–127.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 128.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

unable to budge me from that position. I remember the voices repeating to me, ‘Don’t be afraid: we’re here with you!’ And I was saying to myself, ‘You’re stupid; they’ll carry you.’ And, although I kept saying this to myself, I could not bring myself to let go of that rock. This exceptional panic led me to understand, many years later, the experience of risk. It was not the lack of reasons that prevented me from jumping. I had many reasons not to be afraid, but it was as if they were written on the air, leaving me unaffected. It is analogous to a situation where a person says, ‘Yes, you are right, but I am not persuaded.’ There is a hiatus, an abyss, a void between the intuition of truth, of being—given by reason—and the will, a disassociation between reason, the perception of being, and will, which is affectivity, that is to say, the energy of adhesion to being. (Christianity would point out in this experience a wound produced by ‘original sin.’) Because of this, one sees the reasons, but still does not move, that is to say, lacks the energy to be coherent. [Pay attention!] We are not referring to coherent here in the ethical sense of consequential behavior [Let’s not slide off right away!], but in its theoretical aspect as intellectually adhering to the truth, which reasons let one glimpse.”⁷⁷ At that point he began to understand what the difficulty really was: “How might I have been able to let go of my death grip on that ledge of rock? Only with an enormous amount of will power. But I did not have this will power which, in any case was not the answer... And, here then lies the true definition of the experience of risk: a strange fear of affirming being; strange because it is extraneous to, it contradicts our nature.”⁷⁸ The dissociation between reason and will, a consequence of original sin, causes this lack of energy, so much so that Hans Urs von Balthasar calls it “*Manko an Gnade*”: “A decision against God on the part of one individual—not *any* individual, but the one who founded the family of mankind—has plunged this whole family, not into personal sin, but into a lack of grace [*Manko an Gnade*]. This has consequences for nature’s entire make-up.”⁷⁹ We are dealing with a lack of grace, a lack of energy to adhere, as if I had picked up a bottle and it fell because I don’t have the energy to hold it.

If I cannot get the energy through willpower, what’s the cure? “Nature has a method which manages to give us this energy of freedom, enabling us to overcome, pass through the fear aroused by risk, to con-

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 129.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 130.

⁷⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4: *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994) p. 183.

quer the abyss of the ‘buts,’ ‘ifs,’ and ‘however.’ This is the *communitarian* phenomenon. A child runs down a hallway, pushes open with his little hands the door, which is always open, to an unlit room. Frightened, he turns back. His mother arrives and leads him by the hand. With his hand in his mother’s, the child will go into any unlit room in the world. Only the communitarian dimension renders the human being sufficiently capable of overcoming the experience of risk.”⁸⁰

Not just any companionship will do, as Father Giussani’s example shows. A presence is needed that, through its attractiveness, can overcome the break between reason and affection, and that will be my companion even in the dark: a presence that glues me. This is so true that when things get stark, as they did for the Apostles during the Passion—they all abandoned Him, and not even His presence could stop it—a more powerful strength is needed. “It’s called the risen Christ and His Spirit who rules the world, who enters the world first of all through those He called (Pentecost), and then spreads throughout the world. In the Ascension to heaven He goes to the root of things, which are all His; and things do not realize they are being wielded, but there is a hand that is holding them, and so they feel supported and clarified in the opportune moment. This is called the grace of Christ: grace. And it is this alone that at a certain point accomplishes what the companionship failed to accomplish, and what the great man failed to accomplish.”⁸¹ The power of the Spirit was needed, as Saint Paul explains: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”⁸² And again, as we saw this morning, it is the grace of the Spirit that alone can finally overcome this break between reason and affection, so that one can be born again. This is why the first thing to do is to ask for this grace: *Veni Sancte Spiritus; veni per Mariam*.

And how does the Spirit act? In a privileged place—it’s called “charism”—where we can be educated to overcome this break, if we agree to follow and to welcome the grace that the Holy Spirit gave Father Giussani. In fact, “[t]he communitarian dimension does not replace freedom... Rather, it is the condition for [its] affirmation.”⁸³ With this companionship, constantly begotten by the power of the Spirit, we can risk ourselves in the adventure of life, having been lifted to the full stat-

⁸⁰ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 130.

⁸¹ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così? [Is It (Really?) Possible to Live This Way?]* (Milan: BUR, 1996) p. 106.

⁸² *1 Corinthians* 12:3.

⁸³ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 131.

ure of man. We must ask for this grace; we must go like poor men to eat the bread that is called Eucharist. We are not visionaries. We are well aware that we need, as beggars, to get in line, and go limping to receive the food that we can't get by without. (It's useless, make-believe, to delude ourselves to the contrary.) In the same way, we must go to beg for and receive the grace of forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance, to start over again every time we fall.

The real question is what kind of companionship can accompany us in all situations. And from this point of view (I can hold myself back no longer), Father Giussani's reinterpretation of the myth of Ulysses is very striking: "Imagine this man, with all of his sailors on his boat—wandering from Ithaca to Libya, from Libya to Sicily, from Sicily to Sardinia, from Sardinia to the Balearics—measuring and governing the entire *Mare Nostrum*, sailing over every inch, its length and its breadth. Man is the measure of all things. But, once he arrives at the Pillars of Hercules, he confronts a common belief that all wisdom, that is, the certain measure of all that is real, is no longer possible. Beyond the Pillars of Hercules, nothing is reliable any—all is emptiness and madness. And just as he who ventures beyond this point is a dreamer who will never again have any certainty, so beyond the confines of experience—positivistically understood—there is only fantasy or at least the impossibility of certainty. But he, Ulysses, precisely because of that same 'stature' that had driven him all over the *Mare Nostrum*, felt not only that the Pillars of Hercules were not the end, but they were, in fact, the moment of the unleashing of his true nature. And so he smashed to smithereens this wisdom and went on. He did not make a mistake in doing so: to venture forward was in his nature as a man, and, in making this decision, he truly felt like a man. Ulysses exemplifies this struggle between the human, the religious sense, and the inhuman, the positivist position which marks the entire modern mentality. The latter would say, 'My boy, the only sure thing is what you measure and verify scientifically, with experimentation. Beyond this is useless fantasy, madness, and imaginative assertions.' But beyond the *Mare Nostrum*, what we can possess, govern, and measure, what is there? Beyond is the ocean of meaning. It is in daring to go beyond the Pillars of Hercules—this extreme limit erected by false wisdom, and that oppressive security—and to advance into the enigma of meaning that one really begins to feel like a human being. Reality in its impact with the human heart draws out the dynamic that the Pillars of Hercules evoked in the heart of Ulysses and his

companions, their faces taut with desire for ‘other.’ For those anxious faces and those hearts full of longing, the Pillars of Hercules were not a boundary, but an invitation, a sign, something which recalls one beyond.”⁸⁴ And who can risk going beyond the Pillars? Who can really enter the darkness? Who can accompany us in the moment of hardship? Only the one who lives life at the stature of this human dignity: “This is the stature of the human being in Judeo-Christian revelation. Life, the human being is a struggle, that is to say a tension, a relation ‘in darkness’ with the beyond; a struggle without seeing the face of the other.”⁸⁵

Not just anyone is a traveling companion at this level of the drama, because “[i]t is this relationship with that ‘beyond’ that ensures the adventure of the here and now. Otherwise, boredom dominates—a boredom which is the origin of either elusive and evasive presumption or censorious desperation.”⁸⁶

So the real question, my friends, is whether we want to be a “settled” people or whether we want to take part in this adventure, whether we make our own Mediterranean or whether we let ourselves be challenged by the Pillars of Hercules. Only if this tension toward the beyond is alive can the here and now be endured. The alternative is not living more comfortably, but more bored, more hopeless, more smothered. We will only be able to really be friends if we let ourselves be challenged by the Pillars of Hercules, by that Beyond. But many say that it’s craziness to go beyond...

We can venture beyond the Pillars of Hercules without being crazy, because the Beyond has become a companion, as Saint Paul witnesses to us: “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”⁸⁷ If our Fraternity is not made up of men—as lame as you like, because it’s not a matter of consistency—with faces taut with desire for Someone else, and with hearts full of yearning for Christ, then not only will we betray the charism, but in time it will no longer matter to us. Let us ask the Blessed Virgin and Father Giussani to help us be people who rise to full human stature.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 133–134.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 134.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 133.

⁸⁷ *Philippians* 3:12–14.

Sunday morning, April 25

Before the introduction and after the conclusion:

Franz Schubert, Piano Trio no. 2, Op. 100, D 929

Eugene Istomin, piano – Isaac Stern, violin – Leonard Rose, cello

“Spirto Gentil” no. 14, Sony

Father Pino: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst.”

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ ASSEMBLY

Davide Prosperi: We collected the questions; there were very, very many of them. By way of introduction, I have two observations about them. First, a positive judgment: we are beginning to see, we see the fruit of this year’s work, as a capacity to bring personal experience into play with the proposal being made. The second observation is that most of the questions refer to the second lesson, and this is probably not only because it was closer in time to the assembly, but really because in that lesson it’s clearly seen that the origin of the difficulty in understanding the dynamism of reason becomes clear precisely within the journey we travelled these days, because freedom is not understood if it is unsaddled from the course of reason in the relationship with reality as a sign. We tried to gather the questions, giving a glimpse of the many issues that deserve further investigation.

First question: To me it seems that if I ask for grace, I don’t act; and if I work, it’s as if I could do without grace. How do these two things mix?

Julián Carrón: This is an example of what I was already saying Friday evening: it’s hard for us to understand the relationship that exists between grace and freedom. There’s no need to be frightened, because it’s one of the issues that has caused the most discussion throughout history, and so if it’s hard for us, too, it’s no surprise... But we need to investigate further, because if we do not understand the connection between one thing and the other, it’s as if we had to deny one thing in order to affirm the other. You could almost rewrite the whole history of the West as a dialectic between these two poles.

What matters to us? Understanding what we tried to say these days: that the encounter with Christ, that is, grace, precisely because it has the capacity to reawaken the “I” (with all its reason, all the capacity of its freedom, all its affective capacity), puts work in motion. So, if someone gets to work, it’s already a sign of grace. It is the first sign that a fact has occurred in one’s life that has moved something within. This is not at all opposed to grace! Grace is at the origin, but the proof, the most powerful sign that grace occurs, that it has occurred, is precisely that it puts me to work.

Each of us can understand this very well, because if I am not capable of using reason in a broader way, of using freedom more adequately, and I remain exactly as I am, I find that I am living like everyone else, with the usual confusion. On the other hand, if freedom has this capacity to use reason in a different way, we can face circumstances, life, with a breath, a light, a novelty that we could not otherwise dream of. This is why the first sign of grace is that it puts freedom in motion, it puts us to work.

Prosperi: Does this new birth occur all life long, or does it happen in a moment? Is it an instant or a process?

Carrón: The new birth, as His Eminence Cardinal Scola explained very well to us yesterday, happens in a moment, in Baptism. He told us, “In Baptism every man is conceived anew as a son in the Son and from here, for the baptized, a new conception of self has its origin. [Thus] man is conceived as a Christian in Baptism.” It’s from that point, from that instant that I can say, as the Pope said and Cardinal Scola reminded us, “I, but no longer I.” This is the formula of Christian existence founded in Baptism, and this happened once for all in Baptism, so much so that we say that it imposes a “character”: something happens in Baptism and nothing can erase it. Why can’t it be erased? Because it is a gesture of Christ, who takes all of me and tells me, making it come true, “You are Mine; you belong to Me. You have decided, in asking for Baptism, to stop belonging to you in order to belong to Me. I am your new awareness,” and this bond that Christ creates with me in that instant is forever. This is crucial for our certainty, because it does not depend on the fact that I am good or not so good. It does not depend on me, on my capacity; it is a gesture that is entirely Christ’s. This is why, even if I forget, or I go away, or I slip up in front of everybody (like during the persecutions when Christians who would deny Christ did not have to repeat Baptism), I am not capable of breaking the bond that Christ established with me, so powerful is it. Any father can understand this: what can a son do to him that

would kill that bond? Nothing. It's not hard to understand, and if we who are wretches can do this, let's imagine what Christ can do!

So, this happens once for all in Baptism. And if Baptism was received as children, the Cardinal went on, as it was for most of us, it blossoms in a new conception of life when one's own personal encounter with Jesus in the Church takes place. For this grace that we have received in Baptism to blossom and to reach all the areas of life, all the details of our existence, a journey is required. Father Giussani used a phrase that always struck me: "The encounter of Christ with our lives, by which He has begun to become a real event for us, the impact of Christ with our lives, starting from which He was moved toward us and began, as a *vir pugnator*, a battle for the 'invasion' of our existence, is called Baptism."⁸⁸ This is why what happens in that instant has all of life as its scope.

Look at what a gap in awareness—not that it's not true that I belong to Christ, thanks to grace, thanks to this bond that Christ establishes with me—but what an abyss there is between where we are and living with this awareness! If you want to realize how much we are invaded by distraction, suffice it to think when the last time was that a person, on becoming fully aware of this fact, was moved to the marrow. And how much work remains to be done so that this, which is true, will be assimilated by us as awareness, will become a judgment that fully carries my person along, my awareness, my sensitivity, my affection, everything!

This is why the encounter, as we recalled, due to the grace of the charism, makes the grace of Baptism persuasive and makes it more and more our own through a personal history. We have been gathered together with one another for this reason. There is no purpose for our being together other than for what happened in Baptism to become mine, become yours, become ours. This is the reason we belong to the Church, and this is why the Holy Spirit continues to inspire charisms, that is, operative modalities that make the grace of Christ more persuasive, so that the novelty that this grace introduced into our lives can invade us more and more.

Prosperi: The more intensely I love things, reality, signs, the more I find myself in a defensive position out of fear of losing them. How can loving things intensely be a point of openness instead?

⁸⁸ Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo* [*Generating Traces in the History of the World*] (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998) p. 64.

Carrón: This happens because the more you love something, the more you wish not to lose it. The starting point is that you have something with a value that is so dear to you that you wish not to lose it; the starting point is that you have something beautiful that you love. The first step is positive: you have something. Fear always comes second: you want not to lose something if you have it. So you cannot find an adequate solution unless you go to the depth of the need to not lose it. And you follow a path to find out, “How can I not lose it?” which means, “Who can keep it for you forever?”

In this way a person finds himself faced with a need to which, as everyone is well aware, he cannot respond by himself. And what we were saying yesterday becomes clear, that without the perspective of a “beyond,” “of an ultimate answer which lies beyond the experiential aspects of existence”⁸⁹ (in that case, of justice; now, of love), it would be impossible to maintain this need. So the danger is that I stop at a certain point, that I be unable to stand before the whole depth of the need, because if I do not want to give up on the fullness of the need, I cannot stop; I have to always go beyond. But if we stop, we stay in fear and we do not come to the point where we find the answer that takes away our fear forever in that “beyond.” “If the hypothesis of a ‘beyond’ were to be eliminated, those needs would be unnaturally suffocated.”⁹⁰

Here we starkly see how we lack the idea of the Mystery, and it is clear why Christ came to educate us to the religious sense, to have us understand the nature of this need of ours, because otherwise we would never understand the reasonableness of believing in Jesus Christ. If I were able to respond to these infinite needs by myself, why would I ever have to complicate my life with faith? Why would I ever adhere to something else? I experience that, to this need of mine to love what I love (and that what I love stays forever), I cannot respond on my own. So I either say, unreasonably, that there is no response, thereby suffocating the need and staying afraid, or I do not reduce this need; I give it all the infinite breath it has, the need of a “beyond” that it has.

And so a person celebrates Christ because He exists, because He who keeps what I really love exists. Not because I’m capable, but because Christ exists; Christ exists, and so I can rid myself of this fear.

My friends, the sign that Christ is beginning to be real for us is that we are starting to overcome this fear. Because the problem is that if we

⁸⁹ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 115.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

do not have a response for what we love, we don't have a response for us: Christ is equivalent to nothing, and there is no response for life. It's the same for us and for what we love. Only if we have the loyalty to go to the bottom of the need can we understand what sort of grace it is to have found Someone who takes all our need for justice, for beauty, for love and fulfills it without suffocating it.

Prosperi: You said that everything depends on our capacity to be open in the face of reality, but how can this position be maintained in the face of a totally negative experience like the violation of children, or in the face of a totally mundane one, like washing the dishes?

Carrón: This is exactly the work that needs to be done, my friends: not blocking the question when faced with anything, even the hateful violation of children. If I halt the dynamism of need, I must then do everything in a moralistic way: I have to wash the dishes because I have to wash them, with no meaning, with no connection to my humanity, and this goes for everything. In this way, we will never really be able to understand what Christ means. This is why I recommend that every day you read and learn by heart the first brief paragraph of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*: "It would be impossible to become fully aware of what Jesus Christ means if one did not first become fully aware of the nature of that dynamism which makes man human. Christ proposes Himself as the answer to what 'I' am and only an attentive, tender, and impassioned awareness of my own self can make me open and lead me to acknowledge, admire, thank, and live Christ. Without this awareness, even Jesus Christ becomes just a name."⁹¹

The issue, then, is this loyalty, this being open in the face of reality as it comes to us, beautiful or ugly, because the problem is not whether it is beautiful or ugly, but that I find an adequate response to the question! Then, faced with truly negative things (the violation of children is a perfect example), we understand what can respond to it. The article in *La Repubblica* came out of this question: who responds to this need? Because if there's no chance of a response, then there is no justice anymore! Likewise, there is no meaning in washing the dishes, or in loving someone! These are all needs that arise from the depths of life; everyone has them, even after the Christian encounter—in fact, more powerfully! We are not condemned to turn our heads away from these questions. We are the only ones capable of looking at them head on, and

⁹¹ Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, p. 6.

this only because of the encounter with Christ, because otherwise, like everyone else, we would have to flee, since we can't endure staying in front of all the needs or in front of evil, disasters, or the things that don't make sense to us. Thus the most obvious sign that we are walking a path is that we are capable of facing everything—everything!—without censoring anything. Do you understand? Not a thing.

Prosperi: What does it mean that freedom comes into play not only in the response to reality's provocation, but also in the discovery of destiny?

Carrón: We often think that freedom comes into play afterwards: first, reason discovers reality and then freedom decides whether to live it or not. But this does not take account of all the factors that occur in the process of knowing. It is in the way we stay in front of reality, wide open or not, that we can recognize totality. Father Giussani always taught us this. Just think of the three premises of *The Religious Sense* if you want to understand these things: to understand reality, reality is needed (first premise); reason that becomes aware of all of reality according to all its factors is needed (second premise); and morality in knowing, which has freedom as its protagonist, is needed (third premise).⁹² This is critical, because we are often convinced that we are describing reality, when what we are really describing is already a reduction of reality (because we decided ahead of time that certain things that don't enter our framework must not exist). Father Giussani always reminded us of the example of Pasteur and his discovery of microorganisms: "Pasteur had to repeat his experiments again and again because it seemed that no one was able to recognize their value. The professors at the Sorbonne, members of the Academy of Science in Paris, were the very last to acknowledge their scientific validity. For these men, to admit the soundness of Pasteur's claims would mean going up to the podium the next day and announcing that much had to change—pride, fame, and money were all in the way. The problem of how microbes function, which is an objective, scientific problem, was for them vital. What would those professors have needed to be able to perceive for themselves the value of these experiments, which were irrefutable even to the uninitiated? They would have needed a certain loyalty, a moral dignity, a passion for the true objective: these are the fruits of a long and moral education which these individuals could not have invented by themselves on the spur of the moment."⁹³

⁹² Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, pp. 3–33.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 29.

Freedom is already in play in the way we stay in reality. Sometimes we don't realize how pathetic it is: someone is describing something to you and he doesn't realize that in his way of talking about reality he is already reducing it out of prejudice, out of preconception, out of a framework that keeps him from seeing everything that's there; and he has to convince you, because reality is there anyway and it keeps on contradicting him! At that point it's useless to argue. This often happens among us, especially when faced with facts that are happening, like those which would happen in front of Jesus and the Pharisees wouldn't recognize Him. Were they such fools that they didn't see them? It was not a problem of not seeing them: the facts were in front of everyone. But they were not open, which means that freedom was a part of their way of approaching the discovery of reality. We are not fools either. If we act like this, it's because we are resisting something that's present. Instead of saying that things don't exist, it's more honest to say that we want to resist them, partly because when it occurs it's truly pathetic: is it the others who are seeing things that aren't there, or are you nearsighted in the way that you are looking, so that you can't see well? This weakness applies to all of us, because there are certain things we find hard to admit. This is why the whole drama of life is played out here, in this "very early dawn" of our relationship with reality.

Prosperi: On freedom again, many, many questions are about the "hidden starting point." We chose this one, which seemed particularly clear: In his freedom, man affirms what he has decided from a hidden starting point. How is it possible to break out from an attitude of being closed? For example, the student in your story, after being corrected by you, was still in his initial attitude of being closed two weeks later...

Carrón: The issue is not that a person has prejudices, because it is inevitable to have prejudices. If a person is not a rock, as soon as he sees another person and talks with that person for five minutes, he forms an idea: she's nice, she's not nice, she's dull, and so on. Judgment takes place at the same time. This is not the point, because this is unavoidable. The issue is that when this person inevitably gives me further signs over the course of time, I will not be moved away from my prejudice, even if they try lifting me with a crane! My pupil's problem was not that he had begun with a prejudice, but that he was unwilling to change. And—pay attention!—if it were impossible to change, there would be no freedom:

it is always possible to change. It is always possible for me to surrender to what I see. It is always possible for me to acknowledge what I see, because otherwise we would be trapped in a mechanism we could not escape. We would be negating the person, reducing the person again to antecedent factors of the biological, psychological, or sociological sort. No! The person “is a direct relationship with what everything springs from: with destiny, with mystery, with God.”⁹⁴ Not even original sin erases this: it can be as weakened as you like, but it’s there, that possibility exists! Thus, I can constantly educate myself to this freedom, to this attention and to this acceptance. I can educate myself. If we were not able to educate ourselves, it would mean that it’s pointless to be here, because everyone would already be set up in a certain way and it would be impossible to change anything at all. But it is possible for each one of us, whatever the history, the past, the circumstances, the factors that have created us, because this is part of the concept of person: that the “I” is a relationship with the Mystery.

Prosperi: What you said in the afternoon made me think of my children who do not want to share my experience. (The same could be said of one’s husband or wife or coworker—in short, those we care for.) I ask you: how far does my responsibility toward them go, and what does it mean to respect their freedom?

Carrón: My responsibility toward them is that I live life with all my intensity, that is, responding to Christ who is calling me. I have already given on other occasions two examples that have cleared up this issue for me once and for all. One is the Blessed Virgin. How did the Blessed Virgin contribute to me, to my destiny, to my wellbeing? By saying yes. By saying yes to the angel’s announcement and bringing Christ into history, she contributed to my wellbeing. She left me with all my freedom intact, to make my own personal decision before Christ, but how did she contribute to me? By living her relationship with the Lord. And the other obvious example right in front of us is Father Giussani. What did Father Giussani do for each one of us? He responded to the grace that had been given to him; he responded since the time when he was in the seminary to that insight into his humanity, to that thrill evoked by the words of Giacomo Leopardi, which could find an answer only in the Word made flesh. And in responding to this grace, he communicated it

⁹⁴ Giussani, *L'avvenimento cristiano* [*The Christian Event*] (Milan: BUR, 2003) p. 9.

to us by bearing witness to it: he collaborated in our human actualization, respecting our freedom. It's not as if he did nothing in order to respect our freedom. On the contrary, he did everything in his power to live, to live in front of us, but at the same time not sparing us a grain of energy in taking our own stand, repeating to us that "for fifty years I have been seeing and receiving persons ... betting only on their pure freedom—on pure freedom!"⁹⁵

It is obvious that, in the case of children, this happens during an itinerary, on a journey: it's not the same at eight years old as it is at sixteen. But our responsibility is before Christ who is calling us, because in this way we can witness an intense way of living reality to our children that can challenge them, attracting their freedom. As you experience with your children, it's not as if there is a formula (and even when you think you have the formula, you're not able to enforce one). Why? Because what's at stake is the dignity, the grandeur of the child's person. And if the Mystery has bowed to this method, begging for our freedom, imagine if we can do any different! I will not spell out all the details here, but in my opinion the real issue is not so much organizing our children's lives as it is living in front of them, judging a news story that you watch on television together, a failure or a success at school or at work, grandpa's sickness, and so on.

Prosperi: Now, two questions on the shift of the affective center to the You.

First: Carrón was saying that "we need to shift our affective center from the self to a You. But when do we think of Jesus in this way? When did we seriously think of Him in this way, from October until now?" I can't even understand what Carrón means. It seems to me that I often think of Christ, but I think that here you are talking about another level that I would like to understand.

Connected to this question is the second one: It was said that it is necessary to shift the affective center from the self to a You who is working in reality. Does this You coincide with the companionship? Or what does it have to do with it?

Carrón: My friends, our drama is what the first question expresses: "I can't even understand what Carrón means." We can be here, belonging to the Movement and not knowing what it means. Well, it means what we were saying earlier about Baptism: "I am no longer I; my name

⁹⁵ Giussani, "From My Life to Your Life," *Traces-Litterae Communionis* 3:10 (November 2001) p. IV.

is the name of Christ [which] is mercy.”⁹⁶ And since we do not know by experience what this is, we often reduce it to the companionship. And so in this sense I understand the second question as well: “Does this You coincide with the companionship?”

So I want to offer you one of Father Giussani’s texts which unequivocally clarifies these questions. He is in a house of the Gruppo Adulto. They dedicated a song to him, and he says, “It is really very beautiful in its music, in the way it is sung, in the human feeling of friendship and brotherhood and companionship in an adventure. [Giussani acknowledges everything: the beauty of the music, the friendship, the companionship of those who are together on an adventure.] And yet, if things could be listed like I just listed them and that were it, and something else were taken for granted [namely, Christ]—accepted and acknowledged (let’s be clear!) but taken for granted—if His name were not brought forth by an emphasis of dialogue, of a desire to be heard, of a desire to hear Him; if He were not to have a personality that at some point becomes autonomous, if He were not to have a face that eventually becomes unique, with features that cannot be mistaken even for those whom He Himself has created as a sign of Himself...”⁹⁷ He reduces nothing, but he especially does not reduce Him—a personality that at some point becomes autonomous, a face that eventually becomes unique, with features that cannot be mistaken—to what should be a sign of Him.

If we do not understand this, we go back to reducing the significance of the sign. Because Father Giussani talks about Christ—always!—as an ultimate uniqueness that cannot be mistaken: “If Jesus is not an object of thought (memory), of speech (invocation), contemplated with wonder and zest, to the point that it is expressed as gladness for a presence (‘My heart is glad because You are living’); if days and days go by without saying ‘You’ except in the hurry of repeated formulas,”⁹⁸ then a person can have an outstanding friendship with some people, he can have a satisfying job, and it’s not enough for him. He repeats it later on: “With all the respect, with all the devotion, indeed, with all the possible expression of emotion, with a certain tenderness that can be felt at times... but what prevails is what should be a provisional, analogical foretaste [that is, the staying together, the companionship].”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Giussani, *The Psalms* (New York: Crossroads, 2004) p. 185.

⁹⁷ Giussani, *L’attrattiva Gesù [The Attractiveness That Is Jesus]* (Milan: BUR, 1999) p. 148.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 149.

And then he tells us, “Let’s be alert to the fact that Jesus in our midst can be the origin of the whole world of humanity, full of gladness and friendships, of formally unexceptionable reasons and of formally but also materially concrete help which He is ready to give us..., but Jesus could be reduced to the ‘portrait of a beautiful woman carved on her tomb.’”¹⁰⁰ Jesus can be this for us, even when we are together, and so it is clear that we will not know what it means that He has a unique face, with absolutely unmistakable features. Not that He is denied, for heaven’s sake, but what prevails is that we just cling to the sign.

Instead, “I cannot love unless this noticing, memory and adoration and obedience and discipleship and following and gaze eager to learn and willingness to sacrifice unto death, with which I think of You, I look at You, I follow You, unless all this become concrete, so concrete that You, O Lord, may be the one I love: You, O Lord, are the one I love. ‘What does man desire more powerfully than the truth?’ What is the truth? A man who is present, a *man* who is present: He cannot be dissipated or washed away by the beautiful and glad appearance of the companionship of faces which should be the discreet sign of Him! This happens when you truly say ‘You’ to Him, with all the awareness of the ‘I.’”¹⁰¹

In a conversation with some Gruppo Adulto novices, he answers the question on whether Christ and the companionship nearest you coincide (he is talking about our communities, about our Fraternity!): “Coincide, no! A relationship of an instrumental sort, yes! To educate you, Christ normally uses the house [the community, the Fraternity group]... But placing your hope in the house [in the community, in the Fraternity group] is relying on something that can shatter and fall from one moment to the next, if Christ does not uphold it. Thus my hope is in Christ, not in the house [in the community, in the Fraternity group].”¹⁰² Yet still they press him, “But without the companionship, don’t we fall back into abstraction?” And he starts to lose patience (I do too): “The clearest comparison is that of the sacrament of the Eucharist. In no other thing does Jesus Christ make Himself so present as in the consecrated bread: indeed, He identifies with it (after the consecration, ‘under the species of the bread there subsists the whole living Jesus Christ,’ as the formula from the Catechism says). Our hope, however, is not placed in the ‘species of the bread’: it is in Him who

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 150–151.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* pp. 151–152.

¹⁰² Giussani, “La drammaticità della compagnia” [“The Drama of the Companionship”], *30Giorni* 12:6 (June 1994) p. 42.

is truly present ‘under the species of the bread’; it is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Our hope is in the mystery of God made man who makes Himself present under the species of the consecrated bread.”¹⁰³ In the Church, Christ uses nothing as an instrument as He does the consecrated bread: He identifies with it. But my hope is not the consecrated bread; He makes Himself present among us in the consecrated Host and this consecrated Host—like the first Christians who would keep it at home: think of what a powerful reminder that was!—has an incredible power of memory. But my hope is not there: it is in Him who is there.

Prosperi: How is the aspect of the communitarian method connected to the need for personal work? You said that the communitarian phenomenon is the method for overcoming risk. But in my experience, it seems to coincide with delegating to the community. What is the difference?

Carrón: The difference is what Father Giussani was telling us yesterday—I can find no explanation more concise than that—namely, that the communitarian dimension does not mean the replacement of freedom (and so it is not at odds with work, which is exactly what we were saying before about the relationship between grace and freedom), but is the prerequisite for its affirmation. Let’s look again at the example he gives: “If, for example, I place the seed of a beech tree on a table, it will not develop into anything, even after a thousand years (assuming that everything remains the same). If, on the other hand, I take this seed and plant it in the ground, then it eventually becomes a tree. Now the humus does not replace the irreducible energy, the incommunicable ‘personality’ of the seed. Rather, the humus is the condition needed for the seed to grow. The community is the dimension and condition necessary for the human seed to bear fruit.”¹⁰⁴

We are together for the precise purpose of helping one another toward this. We’re not saying that in order to affirm the individual person we can’t do the Exercises together... No, the point is that if we delegate our lives to the community or to the Fraternity group, then we stumble; we don’t grow; we don’t develop. Let’s imagine a student who is going to school. The prerequisite for learning is that he be in class with his classmates and with the teacher, but learning is not automatic: if he doesn’t work (since no one can replace his freedom), he will never learn; that is, he will not grow. These two things go together.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 131.

The issue is that we often set things at odds with one another, as this question and other ones before it show: grace and freedom, the “I” and the community, Christ and the companionship—everything at odds. It is true that I can never detach Christ from the sign, but neither can I reduce Him to the sign; I cannot relate to Him unless He has His own face that eventually becomes unique, with unmistakable features. Otherwise, we reduce Christ to our being together, and by doing this, imagine where we all go when life places us before evil or before death... If Christ is not a face that eventually becomes unique, how can we respond to all our needs—for example, that things last forever? Can we respond by our being together to the need for justice, for good, for love? Is it possible without the person of the risen Christ?

Prosperi: The last set of questions is on the meaning of following.

First: The support of just any companionship is not enough for a willingness to be begotten again. How does this challenge the depth of our Fraternity relationships?

Second: Can you explain better what following the charism means? It’s easy to come up with images. What is the proof that one is truly following instead of just having the intention of doing so?

Finally: When is following an authority “free”?

Carrón: What is the purpose of the Fraternity?

1) The purpose of the Fraternity is the Movement

In an assembly of the Exercises of the Fraternity, Father Giussani said, “I imagine that a person has encountered Communion and Liberation and that in some way he perceives [that it] is the method by which God has called each of us to live the faith... Then, the Fraternity pertains to a person who has begun to understand in a mature way [precisely this:] that the meaning of his life is to live his faith in the Church and in Christ... [T]herefore they join with others who feel this maturely too, in order to help each other in a preferential, exceptional way, as an efficacious, productive, pedagogical ... sign of how then to live the life of the community... The Fraternity has the same purpose as the Movement, which is to say the maturing of our heart, the maturing of our personality in faith, and thus in what is human, in its humanity... The Fraternity is the experience of the Movement that becomes a sphere of life that tends to impact all of life... [T]hen the first consequence of the Fraternity is that each one who takes part in it must feel the responsibility of the Movement even more... This does not mean that every-

body has to be part of the Diakonia or devote [himself] to this or that in the Movement. I say that everyone first and foremost has to live the fundamental characteristics of the Movement ... taking [his] cue from anything: from someone's illness or a newspaper report, the suffering or joy of another... The practice of the Fraternity life is an urge to mission, to communicate with each other so as to communicate to others this thing that nobody seems to realize: 'He came among His own, and His own did not realize it; He knocked on His own door and His own did not open it for Him.' This is the great injustice of the world."¹⁰⁵

2) *The Fraternity is one*

"The individual bodies into which this one vast companionship gathers ... are groups where the one Fraternity lives. The Fraternity is one [it is only one]; it was recognized as such in the official document ... of the Holy See."¹⁰⁶ "This is why the Holy See has approved not the individual Fraternities ... but *the* Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, because *the* Fraternity of Communion and Liberation is the experience of belonging to the Lord ... that we ... try to live to the full."¹⁰⁷

Therefore, we come together out of a free choice, in order to live the experience of Communion and Liberation, because we do not follow men (Tom, Dick, or Harry), but an experience that the Church has recognized. "[T]he purpose of a little Fraternity group is ultimately to remind us that Christ is everything ... the recognition of Him who is among us and helping each other to live this consciousness ... until it becomes a habit... [T]he life of a Fraternity group is given by the summons to this and the example that emerges... The experience of the Fraternity has its instruments: the main one is the ... core teaching [of the life] of the Movement [because this is the experience that we want to live to the full]; above all, it is the things we say to each other [in the yearly Exercises and in the retreats:] this is what you measure yourself against. Then there is the work of the individual group. But this comes last, because the individual group is not the source of the criterion: the criterion is given by following the norms and directives that come from the life of the Movement in its core teachings, the indications that come from the central Diakonia (which is the only authoritative organ ... rec-

¹⁰⁵ Giussani, *The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation* (Milan: Nuovo Mondo, 2005) pp. 218–219, 140, 169, 147, 220.

¹⁰⁶ Giussani, "Il miracolo della Compagnia" ["The Miracle of the Companionship"], *CL-Litterae Communionis* 10 (October 1992) p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Giussani, *The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, p. 172.

ognized by the Statute [of the Fraternity])”¹⁰⁸ and from the one who presides over it.

Let us look together at how Father Giussani, in his brilliant discretion, sees the life and function of the Fraternity groups: “A Fraternity gives itself a rule . . . first, common prayer; second, obedience to the Center of the Fraternity, a [following]; third, the common fund; fourth, collaboration on a work, which is the Movement, service to the Movement, of any sort.”

3) *The common fund is one*

I want to make a deeper observation on the common fund. From all that has been said up to this point, we can understand that *the common fund is also one* and the Fraternity has always thought of it and proposed it in this way. (I am specifying this not only for new members, but for everyone.) It involves

- a personal commitment
- on a monthly basis (springing from the idea that the common fund could be a portion of one’s salary, thus influencing his way of using goods; poverty)
- in an amount that is *freely chosen*. Father Giussani said, “Participation in the common fund is obligatory and free: obligatory because everyone must participate: free, absolutely free as to the amount.”¹⁰⁹

So determine it with absolute freedom. It doesn’t matter if someone gives a dollar because he can’t give more. I am saying this particularly for those who have let us know about their job difficulties or for the retired people who have written or called us. I will read you one letter as an example: “It is with great regret that I must let you know that I am forced to reduce my monthly contribution to the common fund for 2010. In these past thirteen years, since my husband died, I have always tried to meet the commitment I made without reducing it, despite having three children to raise and educate. Now, unfortunately, a rather serious illness will not permit me to take any more jobs and I am living on my husband’s death benefits. I can, however, assure you that while my contribution is half as much, my affection and my awareness of the Fraternity and that the Fraternity is the means the Lord has given me to experience that reality is a channel and a sign of Him is twice as much.”

This commitment comes before any particular initiative, whether for one’s own community, for a charity, a mission, or anything else. The

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 220, 173.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 117–118.

Fraternity common fund is *for the building up of the common work which is the Movement* and this, we have been taught, is much more to God's glory than any other assistance, however good, to particular persons or activities. This is to educate us and open us up, first of all, to the judgment based on the criterion with which we do everything.

What verifies the truth of a commitment we can then choose to take upon ourselves to support other activities as well is if it helps us to love and be more serious with the Fraternity common fund. (Among other things, this also speaks of the goodness of the activity or work which, in its turn, must open us wider to the one work.) Otherwise, we judge according to our preferences or instincts.

I ask you then to verify if and how the commitment that you took on toward the common fund is following these criteria up until now.

In conclusion, I will read the telegram that we sent to the Pope: "Your Holiness, 'Can a man be born again, once he is old?' This question of Nicodemus formed the title of the yearly Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, in which 26,000 people took part along with thousands of others linked to us in 74 nations. The risen Christ is the only one who makes the rebirth of the 'I' possible as a new way of looking at, judging, and handling reality. He makes Himself our contemporary in the Church to save the whole man, here and now, and to fulfill the infinite need for justice that lies in every heart. We heard this echoing in your letter to the Catholics of Ireland. In memory of Father Giussani, who has made the figure of Jesus familiar to us, we renew our following of his charism which, five years after his death, continues to beget us in the ongoing experience that Christ did not come into the world to replace man's work, but to call each one of us back to true religiosity. As we all wait to gather closely around you on May 16 as sons before a very human father who weeps over the wounds inflicted on the body of Christ, as we saw in Malta, from Rimini we pray for you, who are a fascinating witness of the new man who is born of the Spirit, who with his words and deeds shows us the relevance of faith to life's needs, that is, the human advantage of the Christian event, which overcomes the break between knowing and believing. Asking the Blessed Virgin to be ever more 'glued' to Christ as John and Andrew were, we say to you with all our communities spread throughout the world, 'Thank you, Your Holiness!'"

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF FATHER STEFANO ALBERTO

“I give them eternal life” (*John 10:28*). I am sure that in these days this phrase, “eternal life,” which normally exists as something generic, nebulous, generically hopeful, as something beyond, outside of life, has taken on form and substance for each of us; for if it is true that Christ indicates with this phrase the good destiny that nothing, except our stubborn rebellion, can snatch us away from, the fact remains, as Father Giussani always reminded us and as became vividly evident before our eyes in these days, that eternal life does not begin in the hereafter, but here and now, in the experience of Christ here and now, who moves our awareness and our freedom every day, every instant.

The last word that concludes these Exercises is the word “Father”: “My Father is greater than all.” No one can snatch us out of the Father’s hands. Christ’s last sentence, “I and the Father are one,” clearly reveals that this power, this deep-rooted belonging of each one of us, fragile and sinful, is something concrete. This unity between the Father and Christ is a personal reality: it is the Spirit, the Spirit of our Baptism, as Julián reminded us, by which “it is no longer I who live, but You, O Christ, who live in me” (cf. *Galatians 2:20*). It is the Spirit who takes on historical, persuasive, moving, stirring form in the charism, turning your life upside down.

Let us go back to our houses; let us take up daily life again within the adventure of the Church, within the life of this country, so beautiful and so martyred by forces which do not desire peace and the common good; let us start again, aware of our great responsibility, in gladness, certain of this fatherhood, of this embrace that no one can snatch us away from, and ready to render an account to all, through the offering of our lives, for the hope, the gladness, and the certainty that Christ gives us and continually renews in the charism.

MESSAGES RECEIVED

Dear Father Julián,

I wish once again this year to communicate to all the friends of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the Spiritual Exercises my greetings and my closeness in prayer at this important moment in our history.

I hope that the beauty and the novelty that I am seeing here with us in Brazil may extend to the entire Movement as a grace that suddenly blossoms, as a gift.

Already in the time of GS, Father Giussani had watched Brazil with attention as the point where the universal dimensions of our experience could take on concrete form outside of Italy. And the Lord's promise is fulfilled in an unforeseen way that amazes us and surprises us. I am moved when I hear Cleuza Zerbini who thanks me for the *yes* that, along with many other friends, we have said during these years. In a recent meeting of priests in January, she repeated with touching thankfulness, "Without you, we would not be here." This is the logic of the continuity of a life, united with the admirable logic of the Lord who is "the new beginning."

Moved by what the Lord is doing today in our midst, I send you my greetings along with my prayers.

His Excellency, Bishop Filippo Santoro
Bishop of Petrópolis [Brazil]

Dearest friends,

We are all a living witness for one another that one can be born again, one can in wonder behold the renewal of the intelligence and the heart, so that the life of every day, in the variety of circumstances and situations, becomes an opportunity to live this change and gladly bear witness of it to men.

All of you who are in Rimini—and this year, unfortunately, I cannot be there—know that all this is possible because of the encounter with

Father Giussani and his charism, which we are called to remain faithful to, despite the limitations and contradictions of our existence. In the change of our lives, the power of the risen Lord is made flesh.

With my blessing.

His Excellency, Bishop Luigi Negri
Bishop of San Marino-Montefeltro [Italy]

TELEGRAMS SENT

*His Holiness
Pope Benedict XVI*

Your Holiness, “Can a man be born again, once he is old?” This question of Nicodemus formed the title of the yearly Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, in which 26,000 people took part along with thousands of others linked to us in 74 nations. The risen Christ is the only one who makes the rebirth of the “I” possible as a new way of looking at, judging, and handling reality. He makes Himself our contemporary in the Church to save the whole man, here and now, and to fulfill the infinite need for justice that lies in every heart. We heard this echoing in your letter to the Catholics of Ireland. In memory of Father Giussani, who has made the figure of Jesus familiar to us, we renew our following of his charism which, five years after his death, continues to beget us in the ongoing experience that Christ did not come into the world to replace man’s work, but to call each one of us back to true religiosity. As we all wait to gather closely around you on May 16 as sons before a very human father who weeps over the wounds inflicted on the body of Christ, as we saw in Malta, from Rimini we pray for you, who are a fascinating witness of the new man who is born of the Spirit, who with his words and deeds shows us the relevance of faith to life’s needs, that is, the human advantage of the Christian event, which overcomes the break between knowing and believing. Asking the Blessed Virgin to be ever more “glued” to Christ as John and Andrew were, we say to you with all our communities spread throughout the world, “Thank you, Your Holiness!”

Father Julián Carrón

*His Eminence, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
Secretary of State for His Holiness*

Your Eminence, The message sent in the Holy Father’s name to the 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation present in Rimini and to others linked to us in 74 nations for the Spiritual Exercises made the maternity of the Church present to us. In her we

encounter the person of Jesus. It also made us more certain that following the charism of Father Giussani is the path for us to identify with the Mystery of the risen Christ, the beginning of the new creature. May the Blessed Virgin watch over your grave responsibility of total dedication to Benedict XVI at this moment in history.

Father Julián Carrón

*His Eminence, Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco
President of the Italian Bishops' Conference*

Dearest Eminence, The Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, in which 26,000 people took part along with thousands of others linked to us in 74 nations, saw us meditating upon the question in the Gospel, “Can a man be born again, once he is old?” The certainty that “it is in the communion of the Church that we encounter the person of Jesus Christ” (Benedict XVI), whose Spirit makes us a new creation, allows us once again to take up the path with daily reality in following the charism of Father Giussani, desiring to bear witness that Christ is the only one who responds to the needs of the heart and puts life back in motion.

May Mary never allow you to be without the certainty of her protection.

Father Julián Carrón

*His Eminence, Cardinal Stanisław Rylko
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

Dearest Eminence, During the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, in which 26,000 people took part along with thousands of others linked to us in 74 nations, we had the experience that Christ is the only one who responds adequately to Nicodemus' question, “Can a man be born again, once he is old?” In obedience to the Holy Father and in following Father Giussani, who in the fifth anniversary of his death continues to beget us in the faith, we continue to live as faithful laity to bear witness that the new creature who is born in Baptism lives in the Church the experience of Christ here and now who saves the whole of man.

Father Julián Carrón

ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

by Sandro Chierici

(A guide to following the images taken from the history of art which accompanied the classical music pieces played before and after each session)

The images are taken from the cycle of frescoes by Michelangelo Buonarroti in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican. The cycle unfolds on the central part of the vault (scenes of Creation and the Story of Adam and Eve), in the pendentives and spandrels at the base of the vault (Prophets and Sybils), in the lunettes at the top of the side walls (Ancestors of Christ), and on the western wall (The Last Judgment).

The images were projected in this order:

Creation of Adam; Creation of Eve; The Fall; Expulsion from the Garden; Drunkenness of Noah; The Great Flood; Prophet Zechariah; Delphic Sybil; Prophet Joel; Prophet Isaiah; Eritrean Sybil; Cumean Sybil; Prophet Ezekiel; Prophet Jeremiah; Jonah; Mary (?) or the wife of Jacob; The Last Judgment, entire; The group of angels blowing horns; The mouth of Hell; The resurrection of the dead; The ascent of the elect; The group of martyrs; The elect: the “ecclesia” group; The elect: the group of Dismas; The saints at Christ’s side; Left lunette: Angels with the Cross and the Crown of Thorns; Right lunette: Angels with the pillar and the reed; Christ the Judge and the Virgin.

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