

**MY HEART IS GLAD BECAUSE YOU LIVE, OH CHRIST**  
**Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation**  
**Rimini, April 28, 2017**

*Notes from the Introduction by Julián Carrón*

“Let not your prayer be a mechanical exercise,” Fr. Giussani told us. Therefore, “let us elevate our awareness, let us reawaken our responsibility! [...] The whole world is as if under this leaden pall that is the forgetfulness of the reason one wakes up in the morning, takes things up again, takes oneself in hand again. The impact that all things have on the human person is to say: ‘Wake up [...]’. [...] My God, how this redemption of every morning should be! But instead, an oppressive forgetfulness is what normally disqualifies our days from the beginning, even if they are then full of activity. [...] When we gather together, we do so to look again toward the light [...] [to shake off this forgetfulness, to] not allow the person near us to cry, alone and without a horizon. [...] In this way, in this moment, our head can emerge from the normal fog that usually covers it: we re-gain awareness, resume our responsibility for ourselves and for things, for love of ourselves and for love of the sun, for love of ourselves and for love of people. [...] It is up to us that this companionship be awake in the world and subsist, this possibility of companionship that abolishes the isolation between me and you, between one person and another person, and enables things to be useful, enables time to be useful.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us ask with all the awareness of which we are capable.

*Come Holy Spirit*

As we begin these days together, I’d like to read you the telegram the Holy Father sent us: “On the occasion of the annual Spiritual Exercises of the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation being held in Rimini, His Holiness Pope Francis, spiritually participating with you, sends his cordial and well-wishing thoughts. He wishes for the numerous participants and for those following by satellite link-up abundant fruit of interior rediscovery of the fecundity of the Christian faith in a world lacerated by the logic of profit that produces new poverty and generates the culture of waste, supported by the certainty of the presence of the Risen and Living Christ. The Holy Father invokes the gifts of the divine Spirit so that the revolution of tenderness begun by Christ with His preferential love for the little ones may be actuated, in the footsteps of the meritorious Monsignor Luigi Giussani who exhorted us to make poverty our love and, as he asks you to persevere in prayer in support of his universal ministry, he invokes the celestial protection of the Virgin Mary and gladly imparts to you and all the participants the apostolic blessing you requested, willingly extending it to the entire Fraternity. From the Vatican, April 28, 2017, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness.”

**1. “What would salvation be if it were not free?”**

The way we began this evening seems paradoxical. Fr. Giussani invited us to pray in such a way that our prayer is not mechanical, to elevate our awareness, to reawaken our responsibility, that is, to wield our freedom, and yet shortly before listening to his words, we

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<sup>1</sup> L. Giussani, *Un evento reale nella vita dell’uomo (1990-1991) [A Real Event in the Live of Man]*, Bur, Milan 2013, pp. 219-220.

sang about how we are incapable of living with truth and are contradictory in the use of freedom: “I’ve only learned to deceive myself [...]. / In my hands there is nothing left / but burned earth, names without a reason [...]. / *With my hands / I’ll never be able to bring about justice!*”<sup>2</sup>

Why is it so important to Fr. Giussani that we regain our awareness, that we elevate our awareness, that we wield our freedom? Péguy reminds us of the reason. “But what would salvation be [God says] if it were not free? / How could it be described? / We want him to gain this salvation by himself. / By himself, by man. Procured by himself. / That it should come, in a sense, from himself. Such is the secret, / Such is the mystery of the liberty of man. / Such is the price we put on the liberty of man.”<sup>3</sup>

Who could imagine such a valorization of the human person and our freedom? God truly wants us to be the protagonists of our salvation. This is anything but an emptying of the value of time and history! Why? “Because I, myself, am free, God says, and because I have created man in my image and in my likeness. / Such is the mystery, such is the secret, such is the price / Of all liberty. / This liberty of the creature is the most beautiful reflection that exists in the world / Of the Liberty of the Creator. That is why we attach to it, / That we put on it a proper price.”<sup>4</sup>

But why is it so important to God to involve us in our salvation, knowing that we are wretches? What is the reason for His insistence on our collaboration?

“A salvation [continues Péguy] which was not free, [...] which did not come from a free man would mean nothing to us. [...] What interest could be found in such a salvation? / A beatitude of slaves, a salvation for slaves, a servile beatitude, how do you expect that to interest me? Does one love to be loved by slaves?”<sup>5</sup>

Well before our times, Péguy touched the most sensitive point of today: freedom. If these words were true in some past era of history, all the more so are they true in our times. In fact, ours is a moment in which no conventions hold any longer, in which no custom or usage can be sufficient to communicate Christianity and make it acceptable. Rather, everything seems to be against it. Christianity is no longer in vogue; it is no longer something that can be transmitted by habit or through social customs. For many people around us, faith is “old stuff,” to be discarded without even taking it into consideration. This can have the effect of making us downcast, or it can throw us into the adventure, exalting even more what has been true since the origin of Christianity: Christ proposes Himself to the freedom of the human person.

It is true first of all for us: nothing spares us from exercising our freedom. Nothing can take root in us unless it is embraced and earned in freedom. It is an urgent need that we are the first to sense, as one of you wrote me. “Dearest Julián, three days before the Spiritual Exercises, I felt the desire to communicate to you why I’ve decided once again to participate. It’s not enough for me to respond to an announcement with mechanical adherence. I need to rediscover the reasonableness that makes me be there with an open mind and heart. In a world that seems so far from the gesture we are doing, I nonetheless sense a good and a usefulness for me and the world. In each of our lives, we engage in this great relationship with the Infinite who in a mysterious way touches the finite nature of our lives and calls them to Himself. Opening myself to this has changed the outlook with which I live. As for everyone, life is not simple for me. I have discovered, battling, in the great grace of the road

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<sup>2</sup> C. Chieffo, “La guerra” [War], *Canti [Songs]*, Società Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, Milan 2014, p. 235.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. Péguy, *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents*, translated by Pansy Pakenham, *Catholic Information Network*, 2000, <http://www.cin.org/liter/holyinno1.html>, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Ivi.*

you call us to travel, that life is beautiful not because everything's going well or exactly as I imagined. Life is beautiful because every day there's an opportunity for a relationship with the Mystery, and everything can become a challenge to discover it and receive that something more for yourself. What frees me from anxiety and fear (the true diseases of our time, which people try to treat with drugs) is having experienced the fact that sudden, unexpected things enclose something that has been prepared for me, an opportunity to deepen this relationship with the Mystery. I need to hear again One who calls me by name, to know that what He has begun with me will never end. Therefore I am grateful to you, who are called to reawaken our gaze and our heart to the attraction of Jesus and to each of us, passionate about our own destiny."

After all, who would be interested in a salvation that was not free, a slavish beatitude? What pleasure would God find in being loved by people who did so out of inertia or being forced? It would have cost God nothing to create other beings who fulfilled their task mechanically, like slaves, just as He could have created other stars that orbited mechanically. They, too, would have contributed to making His power shine forth, as Péguy said. "My power blazes forth clearly enough in the sands of the sea and in the stars of the sky. / It is not contested, it is known, it blazes forth clearly enough in the inanimate world. / It blazes forth clearly enough in the ordering, / Even in the occurrence of man."<sup>6</sup>

So then, what did God want? "But in my animate creation, God says, I have willed better, I have willed more. / Infinitely better. Infinitely more. For I have willed this liberty. / I have *created* this very liberty. [...] / Having once known what it is to be loved by free men, the prostrations of slaves no longer mean anything to you. / [...] Nothing can weigh as much, nothing can cost as much. It is certainly my greatest invention."<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, God wanted something better. We know this as well. "Having once known what it is to be loved by free men, the prostrations of slaves no longer mean anything to you," "one no longer has any taste for subservience." God wanted something "Infinitely better. Infinitely more": to be loved freely.

"Ask a father if his best moment / Is not when his sons begin to love him like men, / Him as a man, / Freely, / Gratuitously, / Ask a father whose children are growing up. // Ask a father if there is not a chosen time above all / And if it is not precisely when submission ceases and when his sons become men / Love him (treat him) so to speak from knowledge, / As man to man, / Freely, / Gratuitously. / Esteem him thus. / Ask a father if he does not know that nothing is equal / To the glance of a man meeting the glance of a man. // Well, I am their father, God says, and I know man's condition. / It is I who made him. / I do not ask too much of them. / I only ask for their hearts. / When I have their hearts, I am satisfied. I am not hard to please. / All the slavish submissions in the world are not worth one frank look from a free man. / Or rather all the slavish submissions in the world repel me and I would give anything / For one frank look from a free man."<sup>8</sup>

One frank look, not perfection, but the frank look of a free man. Péguy concludes, "To that liberty, to that gratuitousness I have sacrificed everything, God says, / To that taste I have for being loved by free men, / Freely, / Gratuitously, / By real men, virile, adult, firm. / Noble, tender but with a firm tenderness. / To obtain that liberty, that gratuitousness, I have sacrificed everything, / To create that liberty, that gratuitousness, / To set going that liberty, that gratuitousness. // To teach him liberty."<sup>9</sup>

Saint Gregory Nyssa reminds us of this with other words, "For He who made man for the

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<sup>6</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

participation of His own peculiar good, [...] would never have deprived him of that most excellent and precious of all goods; I mean the gift implied in being his own master, and having a free will.”<sup>10</sup> What interest is there in a salvation that is not free? For us, none, but none for God, either. Salvation becomes interesting for the human person and for God only if it is free. For God, because He wants to be loved by free people and not by slaves, and for us, because otherwise it would not be my salvation, your salvation. Freedom is crucial in order not to understand salvation as something to do with slaves, something forced from which in the end we defend ourselves, but instead, as pertinent to our needs as human beings. Throughout history we have seen where salvation that is not free leads, salvation imposed by force, habit or fear. Being forced has inured many against this kind of salvation, and habit has caused interest in it to be lost over time.

So then, the big question that each of us must ask ourselves at the beginning of our gesture together is simple: is salvation still interesting for me? Not habit, not the mechanical repetition of certain gestures, but salvation! Am I still interested as I was in the beginning, with the same heart-thawing yearning of the beginning? As we know, it is not something taken for granted. Time and the vicissitudes of living do not give discounts to anyone. For this reason, each of us must look at our own existence and answer in the first person.

## 2. “Christ remains isolated from the heart”

Preparing the preface for the new book that collects the Spiritual Exercises preached by Fr. Giussani, I came up against the concern that loomed over him in the first Exercises, in 1982, the year of the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity. On that occasion, he set before everyone’s eyes the fact that simply remaining passively in the Movement was not enough to maintain the freshness of the beginning, to keep interest in the encounter experienced. And habit could not suffice to preserve that beginning for us, either, who were chosen, graced by the overwhelming gift of the encounter with Christ through Fr. Giussani. In fact, he said, “You have grown up, and while you have secured a human ability in your professions, there is the possibility of drifting away from Christ (in contrast with the emotion of all those years ago [not the coherence, but the emotions of many years ago] and, above all, certain circumstances of all those years ago). There is a kind of drifting away from Christ, except in particular moments [except on certain occasions]. [...] Except when, for example, you do something in His name, or in the name of the Church, or in the name of the Movement.” As we see, Fr. Giussani did not let himself be confused by a possible euphoria about the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity. Even though we could be engaged in many things, “it is as if Christ were far from our heart [...] or, rather, Christ remains isolated from the heart.”<sup>11</sup> Simply remaining was not enough to continue to experience the “emotion of all those years ago,” of the beginning.

The key point of Fr. Giussani’s judgement was his perception that in becoming adults, we lived life with all its commitments, as right as they are, in a way in which “Christ remains isolated from the heart.” If Christ is isolated from the heart, sooner or later He ceases to be interesting. In fact, Christ is interesting precisely because of the way He causes our heart to vibrate, to correspond to it totally and to enable us to perceive this correspondence.

But this isolation of Christ from the heart concerns not only our relationship with Him, but also the relationship with everyone. The remoteness of Christ from the heart, Fr. Giussani

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<sup>10</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism, chapter 5*. <http://www.study-light.org/history/early-church-fathers/view.cgi?pn=2&sid=pos&aid=05-01%20,%2005-02&file=npnf2-05-39>.

<sup>11</sup> L. Giussani, *Familiarity with Christ, Notes from a lesson by Fr. Luigi Giussani during the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, May 8, 1982. Traces, n. 2, 2007*. <http://archivio.traces-cl.com/2007E/02/familiarity.html>

continues, generates another one seen in “an ultimate embarrassment amongst us – I am speaking of husbands and wives, too – [...] the distancing of Christ from the heart distances the ultimate aspect of my heart from the ultimate aspect of your heart, except in everyday actions (keeping house, looking after the children, etc.)”<sup>12</sup>

If the isolation of Christ from the heart concerns the relationship with everything, it is “because the heart,” he says soon after, “is how you look at your children, how you look at your wife or your husband, how you look at someone passing you on the street, how you look at the people in the community or your colleagues at work, and, above all, how you get up in the morning.”<sup>13</sup> Now, if Christ has nothing to do with the way we look at our wife, husband, a person passing by, colleagues, etc., then He has nothing to do with life, with ninety-nine percent of life. Consequently, over time He becomes useless and we lose interest in Him.

We know well, by experience, that Christ became for us an interesting presence because He made our heart vibrate, made our “I” vibrate in a different way in front of everything (“Reality makes itself evident in experience,”<sup>14</sup> Fr. Giussani told us). In the same way, we discovered that he or she was the person with whom we wanted to share our life because that person made the depths of our “I” vibrate. Was that vibration only sentimentalism or was it rather the opportunity to discover the importance of that presence for us? The same holds for the encounter with Christ, for the impact with His presence, in the experience of the beginning.

To understand how things are for us, just ask yourself: what prevails now as sentiment of living? What do I discover as my ultimate foundation? What is the dominant thought? What is the background music that predominates? The human person is one, and in the end, there is one thought – whatever it may be – that dominates, one ultimate sentiment of living that predominates. All the analyses are useless, because each of us finds ourselves in the open in front of the great question: has Christ remained interesting as He was the first time?

Just look at the heart-thawing yearning that the beginning provoked in us to see whether Christ remains more glued to our heart now than He was then, or whether today He is more distanced, more isolated from the heart compared to the initial leap of the heart that made us “seized” people. Here is the alternative: seized or isolated. Ever more seized or ever more isolated. I do not say this so that we can measure ourselves moralistically – let’s not waste time on that! – but so we realize whether He has remained interesting as He was in the beginning, so we become conscious of how enthusiastic we are now compared to then.

### **3. A journey to make**

Christ’s distance from or closeness to the heart involves our freedom. This same freedom is at stake in the relationship with the one who made Christ so close to us, Fr. Giussani, his charism, the inheritance we have received.

During the March 7, 2015 audience, the Pope reminded us, “Faithfulness to the charism does not mean ‘to petrify it’ – the devil is the one who ‘petrifies,’ do not forget! Faithfulness to the charism does not mean to write it on a parchment and frame it. The reference to the legacy that Don Giussani left you cannot be reduced to a museum of records, of decisions taken, of the rules of conduct. It certainly entails faithfulness to tradition, but faithfulness to tradition, Mahler said, ‘is not to worship the ashes but to pass on the flame.’ Don Giussani would never forgive you if you lost the liberty and transformed yourselves into museum

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> L. Giussani, *Dal temperamento un metodo [From Temperament A Method]* Bur, Milan 2002, p. 143.

guides or worshippers of ashes. Pass on the flame of the memory of that first encounter and be free!”<sup>15</sup>

Without freedom, the life of each of us could become a museum of records of old times. If there is not something that predominates in the present as more interesting than all the memories, life is blocked, because all the memories, no matter how beautiful they may be, the decisions made, the codes of conduct, are not enough to keep the flame alive now. It is a journey that can never be suspended: you cannot live off the past. Von Balthasar wrote this in the early 1950’s: “A truth that continues only to be transmitted, without being thought through deep down, has lost its vital force.”<sup>16</sup> And in the same years, Guardini said, “In the monotony of pure carrying on, we will suffocate.”<sup>17</sup>

In that moment, in 1982, while everyone was happy to be in Rimini to celebrate the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity that had just happened, Fr. Giussani did not release his hold, did not break his grip on a passion for the life of each of us. He was concerned that that moment, marked by the Holy See’s act of recognition, should be the opportunity to become aware that as we were becoming adults, our life was drifting away from Christ. What was Fr. Giussani worried about? The maturity of the experience of the people of the Fraternity – above all after the recognition – a maturity that today as well depends exclusively on the journey that each of us must make.

He was well aware that there are no formulas or user’s manuals that can substitute the move of freedom: it is indispensable for the fulfillment of the journey toward maturity, toward the truth of ourselves. He said, “How striking it is to think that life, time, has changed. Why does a mother give the world a little child and that fellow lives forty, fifty, sixty, eighty, ninety years? So that he may change! So that he may transform! What does it mean to transform? Become ever more true, that is, ever more yourself.”<sup>18</sup> As Kierkegaard observed, “I do not in truth know [...] the truth, except when it becomes life in me,”<sup>19</sup> and this is the sense of the change, of the transformation. This is the ultimate reason for Fr. Giussani’s call: that we become ever more true, ever more ourselves. This is anything but moralism! But it is a change that cannot happen without us, without our freedom, without the constant involvement of each of us.

Why did Fr. Giussani insist so much on the need for a journey of maturation? Because the possibility of the fullness of our life, of our becoming ourselves, depends on the maturation of our familiarity with Christ. Otherwise, alienation dominates. But this maturation is not taken for granted, does not happen automatically, simply with the passage of time, with becoming older, nor is it taken for granted for those who grew up in the experience of the Movement. This is why, in 1982, Fr. Giussani said there is “the ambiguity of growing up” [...] I don’t believe that it is a characteristic, a statistically normal characteristic, that growing up has made us more familiar with Christ [...] has given the answer to the question with which we heard the proposal 25 years ago. I don’t think so.”<sup>20</sup>

It is not statistically normal that becoming older makes us more familiar with Christ! We

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<sup>15</sup> Francis, *Address to the Communion and Liberation Movement*, March 7, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> H.U. von Balthasar, *La percezione dell’amore. Abbattere i bastioni e Solo l’amore è credibile [The Perception of Love. Break Down the Bastions and Love Only Is Credible]*, Jaca Book, Milan 2010, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> R. Guardini, *Natale e capodanno. Pensieri per far chiarezza [Christmas and New Year’s. Thoughts to bring clarity]*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1993, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> L. Giussani, *Una strana compagnia [A Strange Companionship]*, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Esercizio del cristianesimo [Practice in Christianity]*, in Id., *Le grandi opere filosofiche e teologiche [The Great Philosophical and Theological Works]*, Bompiani, Milan 2013, pp. 2109, 2111.

<sup>20</sup> L. Giussani, *Familiarity with Christ*, op. cit..

can perceive these words as a rebuke that annoys us or we can embrace them with boundless gratitude, as the gesture of one who cares so much for our life, our journey, that he uses every opportunity to call us to the truth of ourselves, so that we will not end up in nothingness.

So the question arises: why does interest lessen to the point that we feel Christ far from our heart? Why has growing older not increased our familiarity with Him? Because, as Fr. Giussani always told us, spontaneity is not enough, because becoming adults is not a spontaneous process: it requires a commitment of freedom, a journey, as it was for the apostles, “the itinerary of conviction.”<sup>21</sup>

Let us allow ourselves to be guided by Fr. Giussani in this renewed realization of the journey ahead of us for the maturation of our faith. A commitment of freedom, first of all, is needed to keep open our humanity: “the ultimate openness of the spirit [...] is something demanding a continual commitment from us, even if it takes its cue from each person’s natural gifts. What a great responsibility education has: that capacity to understand, even if it does respond to our nature, is not spontaneous. On the contrary, the original gift of sensibility in us would be suffocated if it were treated as pure spontaneity; to reduce religiosity to this pure spontaneity is the most definitive and subtle way of persecuting it, of exalting the fluctuating, provisional aspects bound to circumstantial sentimentality. If this gift of sensibility for our humanity is not constantly solicited and given order, no fact, not even the most startling, will find correspondence within us. Sooner or later, we all experience that feeling of obtuse alienation from reality. This happens on one of those days when we let ourselves be led adrift by circumstances, when we have remained uncommitted to making an effort of any kind. On such a day, suddenly, things, words, and deeds, once such clear motivations, cease to be so, and, abruptly, we no longer understand them.”<sup>22</sup>

What finds the correspondence? Our heart, our humanity. If our heart is not awake, no fact, not even that of Christ, will be able to show and realize its correspondence to it. And without correspondence, the only thing that prevails is alienation. “How alone I am here! Great God, how alone I am here, and how foreign I feel! Everything around me is hostile to me and there’s no place for me. Even the things around me would say they do not see me and that I do not exist. [...] Reality is absent. True life is absent.”<sup>23</sup> It is not enough that Christ continue to happen, if I lack that openness that enables me to realize it, to not feel alienated from Him, if I am obtuse to His being present. Therefore, without freedom it is not possible for salvation to remain interesting. Emphasizing freedom is essential; it is not something added on, even if this does not at all mean that in life we can manage on our own. No! It means that without engaging all our humanity freely, Christ remains isolated, far from us.

#### **4. “Our first danger is formalism”**

What is the consequence of this isolation of the heart from Christ, of this obtuse alienation that we feel at times, even after such a long time? Formalism. “Therefore, our first danger is formalism, repeating words or repeating gestures, but the words or gestures do not shake you or make you think twice, that is, move something in you, illuminate a bit more your gaze upon yourself, nourish a conviction about a value (for example, that you should throw yourself into working for the elections because it is a need for your humanity, otherwise a measure for your

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<sup>21</sup> L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1998, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>23</sup> P. Claudel, *Il pane duro [The Hard Bread]*, in *Id.*, *Il pane duro—Destino a mezzogiorno [The Hard Bread—Destiny at Noon]*, Massimo, Milan 1971, p. 102.

humanity is lacking).”<sup>24</sup> Giussani said these things at the beginning of the 1980’s, speaking to leaders of university students in CL. But how current they are, how true they hold for us, too!

Formalism is a faith that runs parallel to life, that is satisfied with the repetition of words and gestures; it is an adherence that identifies with participation in certain moments or with the carrying out of certain activities; but, in the degree to which it does not move something in me, outside of those moments and after those activities, we find ourselves in front of life like everyone, we, too, gripped in the alternative between “desperate presumption and darkest despair.”<sup>25</sup>

Fr. Giussani also spoke about “a formalism in adhering to the community,” which he described in this way: “You are not all set because you do School of Community. You are not all set because you participate in Holy Mass with your priest. You are not all set because you hand out flyers or hang up posters. This can be the formality with which you pay your dues for belonging to this social reality. But when does all this become experience? When it says something to you and moves something in you (‘movement’).”<sup>26</sup>

Again, speaking to university students, in 1977 he said, “The true problem is formalism of faith. We are in an era in which faith is totally reduced to formalism. [...] You do not start from the awareness of Christ as my life and therefore, as the life of the world and therefore, of the world as my life.”<sup>27</sup>

The great Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément was also aware of this: “The practice of the Church changes without one’s noticing it, not due to a conscious creation, but due to yieldings, scleroses, deviations, *a posteriori* reinterpretations, veneration of habits that in and of themselves are contingent.”<sup>28</sup>

This is a point Fr. Giussani never let us forget. In a 1984 text, he stated: “No expression of a movement like ours is of worth if it does not invoke the memory of the presence of Christ in the heart of the concrete vicissitudes we live. Rather, it worsens the situation of the human, because it promotes formalism and moralism. It would make the event among us – the event that we should keep with trembling in our eyes and heart as the criterion of our behavior with each other – deteriorate into a sociological refuge, a social position.”<sup>29</sup>

And in the new book of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, he adds, “So then, there is this phenomenon by which, [...] in certain moments our soul grows and rises, [...] is ‘reawakened,’ moves, but then the gaze of everyday life returns to being all glabrous, all homogeneous, all bounded, all suffocated. It is as if we never join these two moments of thought and of gaze upon ourselves, except from the outside, moralistically, in the sense that, since we have faith, certain things cannot be done, and certain other things must be done. And this is from the outside, not from within: what you do or do not do is not the expression of a new consciousness (conversion), of a truth of yourself, but is like a toll paid, rendered to something external, even if devotedly and profoundly acknowledged and esteemed. Instead,

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<sup>24</sup> L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983) [Men without a Homeland]*, Bur, Milan 2008, pp. 194-195.

<sup>25</sup> L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2006, p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)*, *op. cit.*, p. 194, quoted in *A Presence within the Gaze, 2015 Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, p. 39, file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/file\_6\_3548%20(3).pdf

<sup>27</sup> L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza (1975-1978) [From Utopia to Presence]*, Bur, Milan 2006, pp. 109-110.

<sup>28</sup> O. Clément, *La rivolta dello spirito [The Revolt of the Spirit]*, Jaca Book, Milan 1980, p. 82.

<sup>29</sup> L. Giussani, “Appendice [Appendix],” in Id., *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]*, Jaca Book, Milan 1984, p. 90.

no: either God is life, or it is as if He is outside our door.”<sup>30</sup> This alternative is at stake in every moment, in every circumstance, at the beginning of every action, when we begin to work or when we establish a relationship: either God is life or He is relegated to outside the door.

When we succumb to this separation between God and life, between the presence of Christ and life, between faith and life, our tasks become a mere appendage to our existence, something extraneous to our heart. As the Pope wrote in *Evangelii gaudium*: “Today we are seeing in many [...] an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity. At the same time, the spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization. As a result, one can observe in many agents of evangelization, even though they pray, a heightened individualism, a *crisis of identity* and a *cooling of fervour*.”<sup>31</sup>

Many activities without spirituality are not desirable; everything gets worn down. Again, Pope Francis describes the result of the separation between faith and action: a tiring activism. “The problem is not always an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. As a result, work becomes more tiring than necessary, even leading at times to illness. Far from a content and happy tiredness, this is a tense, burdensome, dissatisfying and, in the end, unbearable fatigue.”<sup>32</sup>

What is the consequence of all this? “And so the biggest threat of all gradually takes shape: ‘the gray pragmatism of the daily life of the Church, in which all appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down and degenerating into small-mindedness.’ A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum. Disillusioned with reality, with the Church and with themselves, they experience a constant temptation to cling to a faint melancholy, lacking in hope, which seizes the heart like ‘the most precious of the devil’s potions.’ Called to radiate light and communicate life, in the end they are caught up in things that generate only darkness and inner weariness, and slowly consume all zeal for the apostolate. For all this, I repeat: Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization!”<sup>33</sup>

##### **5. The basis of the problem: “We have been detached from the human foundation”**

When Christ is isolated from the heart and does not appear interesting for our life, Christianity crystallizes into doctrine. If I do not recognize Christ as a need of mine, if I do not discover Him as essential for the fullness of my days, as the Presence I cannot live without – because I have a need that nothing else can satisfy – Christianity remains at best a noble pretext for my social or religious engagement, from which I expect realization – or satisfaction – which, however, will never come. For this reason, it is necessary not to misunderstand the nature of the heart, the importance of our desire, of our need, and not to fool ourselves into thinking we can satisfy it with something other than His Presence. In fact, Christ becomes isolated when our heart becomes isolated from ourself.

Fr. Giussani clearly identified the heart of the question that the Pope so well described, that leads us to isolation from Christ and from ourselves. “We Christians [he said in Chieti in

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<sup>30</sup> L. Giussani, *Una strana compagnia [A Strange Companionship]*, op. cit., pp. 194-195

<sup>31</sup> Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 78.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

1985] in the modern climate have not been detached directly from the Christian formulas [we can know them by heart], from the Christian rites [we can continue to repeat them], from the laws of the Christian Decalogue [we can continue to be faithful to them]. We have been detached from the human foundation, from the religious sense. We have a faith that is no longer religiosity [...], that no longer responds as it should to the religious sentiment.” Therefore we have a faith that is “unaware, a faith that no longer has intelligence of itself. An author I have loved reading for years, Reinhold Niebuhr, said, “Nothing is as unbelievable as the answer to a question which has not been asked.” Christ is the answer to the question, to the hunger and thirst of the human person for truth, happiness, beauty and love, justice, and ultimate meaning.”<sup>34</sup>

Faith loses our interest, is emptied, in proportion to how much we separate or let ourselves be separated from the human foundation. This is why Christ begins to become distant, and with Him the others and all of reality, and the things we do begin to become a toll to pay. As Tolstoy said, “I felt that what was indispensable for living eluded me.”<sup>35</sup>

The obliteration of Christ today – in our Western society – does not pass primarily through the explicit and frontal contestation of Christ, but through the reduction of the human, of the desires and needs of the human person, through the censure of our thirst, that is, of our original poverty. In this way, Christ becomes a pure name (and we have repeated it many times) and Christianity is transformed into a cultural matrix and into the point of departure for an ethical stance.

We can trace in this the Enlightenment’s influence on us. “Contingent truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason,”<sup>36</sup> said Lessing. And Kant added, “A historical faith, based merely on facts, can extend its influence no further than the tidings relevant to a judgment on its credibility can reach.”<sup>37</sup> We also thought we could know, could change, could develop an efficient concept and praxis without the reality of Christ, that is, we believed we could do without the Fact, the historic and carnal presence of Christ, who in the Church makes it possible for us to experience Him.

But, as Fr. Giussani said – and we repeated at the Spiritual Exercises last year – a “particular story [is] the keystone of the Christian conception of man, of his morality, in his relationship with God, with life, and with the world.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, only within the particular history generated by Christ, only through the experience of Christ in the heart of each of us, can a true conception of the human person, the opportunity for morality, emerge and thrive in time. It is the event of Christ, the historical encounter with His presence, now as then, that makes possible the opening to the full truth about the human person and the journey toward it.

Let’s listen to how Fr. Giussani describes the detailed, precise happening of this particular history in his life: “If I had never encountered Msgr. Gaetano Corti in high school, if I had never heard the few Italian lessons of Msgr. Giovanni Colombo, who later became Cardinal

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<sup>34</sup> L. Giussani, *La coscienza religiosa nell’uomo moderno [Religious Awareness in Modern Man]*, November 21, 1985, in Quaderni del Centro Culturale “Jacques Maritain” [Notebooks of the “Jacques Maritain Cultural Center”] - Chieti, January 1986, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> L. Tolstoy, *La confessione [Confessions]*, SE, Milan 2000, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> G.E. Lessing, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Philosophical and Theological Writings*, transl. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> I. Kant, “Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,” in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, transl. A. Wood and G. di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 113

<sup>38</sup> Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2010, pp. 134-135.

of Milan, if I had never met those kids who in front of what I said opened their eyes wide as if surprised by something as inconceivable as it was welcome, if I had never begun getting together with them, if I had never found more and more people who got involved with me, if I had not had this companionship, if you had not had this companionship, Christ, for me and for you, would have been a word that is the object of theological expressions, or, in the best case, a call to a ‘pious’ affectivity, generic and confused, that only became precise in the fear of sins, or in other words in moralism.”<sup>39</sup>

But – returning to the theme I left open – to escape from the crystallization of Christianity into doctrine (theological expressions) or its reduction into ethics (moralism), a childbirth, a travail is needed. It is necessary that Christ not be added to our existence from the outside, but be at the root of our consciousness and our action, such that the evidence of His presence flows from within life faced in the relationship with Him, in the light of the bond with His presence, as Mounier said in this passage read and commented by Fr. Giussani at the 1989 Spiritual Exercises: “It is from the earth, from the solidity [the earth or the solidity is the set of conditions in which life is incarnated: your clothes, the voice I have, the eyes that serve me to a certain point] that necessarily derives a childbirth full of joy [or of cries, but cries of gladness for what is being born], the patient sentiment of the work that is growing [what is born becomes big, organizes itself, becomes a body, a journey, a story full of patience], of the steps that follow one after the other [the steps of history], you wait calmly, with certainty [certainty because He is here]. It is necessary to suffer so that truth does not crystallize into doctrine.” Everything is suffering: travail and birth, patience, one step after another that does not come right away, the supreme sacrifice of certainty, that is, of the certainty in an Other. It is suffering because the fact that Christ is among us does not remain an example or a set of moral values, but is born from the flesh. It is necessary to suffer: to adhere to the way in which this presence is among us. Christ rose but He passed through death. In the prayer of the Angelus we ask God that we, who have known the incarnation of His Son Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection, may be brought to the experience of His glory, to the change of life and the world. Adhering to Christ, letting Him penetrate into our flesh, means looking, conceiving, feeling, judging, evaluating, trying to treat ourselves and things with the memory of His presence, with the eyes of His presence. [...] From this memory all morality is derived. Not one jot of the law is abolished, but His presence provides its foundation.”<sup>40</sup>

As the Pope said on Holy Thursday, “the truth of the *good news* can never be merely abstract, incapable of taking concrete shape in people’s lives.”<sup>41</sup>

A teacher wrote me, “Participating in a GS gesture, I was having lunch with some young people. I asked the young man in front of me his name and age, and what school he attended. “Sixteen, third year of college prep high school.” Then I asked him other questions, and he answered in a tone void of any vibration, “Yes, I’m happy. I agree with everything I’ve heard, but these things aren’t new. I already know them. I heard them from the priest of the community I’ve been meeting with for three years now. For me it was a deeper look at these things.” The boldfaced taking for granted, in the flesh, right there in front of my eyes! I felt trapped in that dialogue. I had a terrible desire to withdraw from it, and yet, deep down, truly deep down, I couldn’t help thinking that I was grateful because it made me aware of myself, of my desire. This wound knocked me to my knees: without You, without You Christ here, now, present, I am nothing. I lose my humanity, my ‘I.’ In the banal exchange of a “dull”

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<sup>39</sup> L. Giussani, *Qui e ora. 1984-1985 [Here and Now, 1984-1985]*, Bur, Milan 2009, pp. 209-210.

<sup>40</sup> L. Giussani, *Occorre soffrire perché la verità non si cristallizzi in dottrina ma nasca dalla carne [It is necessary to suffer so that the truth does not crystallize into doctrine but is born from the flesh]*, *Esercizi Spirituali della Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione [Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation]*, Rimini 1989, p. 24.

<sup>41</sup> Francis, *Homily for the Holy Chrism Mass*, April 13, 2017.

lunch I was able to discover the fundamental need, the essential need of my existence: to realize that You exist. Up to a short time before, a fact of the kind would not even have registered or would have only provoked a brief impatience, almost annoyance. What immense gratitude I feel to Fr. Giussani, who introduced me to a journey in which nothing, truly nothing, can be forgotten or excluded!”

These lines document how much we need the poverty – so much so as to kneel and pray for it – to which the Pope called us in the letter he sent us (to thank us for the offering we gave after the Jubilee pilgrimage), and which I will talk about tomorrow. Everything becomes flat, taken for granted, without the awareness of our poverty, our need, without the engagement of our freedom. How right was Péguy! If we do not become the protagonists of it, as he said, salvation will not interest us.

## 6. “One can stand on the side of the sepulchre or on the side of Jesus.”

In his Easter homily, the Pope said, “Let us think for a while, each of us, think about the daily problems, the illnesses we have been through or of one that a relative has; let us think about wars, human tragedies and with simplicity, with a humble voice, without flowers, alone, before God, before us, let us say, ‘I do not know how this is, but I am certain that Christ is Risen and I have put a wager on it.’ Brothers and sisters, this is what I wanted to say to you. Go home today repeating in your hearts: ‘Christ is Risen’.”<sup>42</sup>

With Christ we can face any situation in which we find ourselves. This is the verification. We are not condemned to crystallization and aridity, but, once again, to carry out this verification, our freedom is needed. We have to decide where we stand.

The Pope said this so clearly and movingly in Carpi on April 2. He was speaking about the earthquake victims of Emilia, but his appeal holds for us, today. “Let us pause [...] on the last of the miraculous signs which Jesus performs before his Easter, at the sepulchre of his friend, Lazarus.[...] A great “*encounter-clash*” thus occurred at that sepulchre. *On the one hand, there is the great disappointment*, the precariousness of our mortal life which, pierced by anguish over death, often experiences defeat, an interior darkness which seems insurmountable. Our soul, created for life, suffers upon hearing that its thirst for eternal good is oppressed by an ancient and dark evil. On the one hand, there is this defeat of the sepulchre. *But on the other, there is the hope* that conquers death and evil, and which has a name: the name of hope is Jesus. [...] Dear brothers and sisters, we too are called to decide on which side to stand. One can stand *on the side of the sepulchre* or *on the side of Jesus*. There are those who allow themselves to be closed within their pain and those who open up to hope. There are those who remain trapped among the ruins of life, and those who, like you, with God’s help, pick up the ruins of life and rebuild with patient hope. In facing life’s great ‘whys?’, we have two paths: either stay and wistfully contemplate past and present sepulchres, or allow Jesus to approach our sepulchres. Yes, because each one of us already has a small sepulchre, some area that has somewhat died within our hearts; a wound, a wrongdoing endured or inflicted, an unrelenting resentment, a regret that keeps coming back, a sin we cannot overcome. [...] Thus, we hear directed to each one of us Jesus’ words to Lazarus: “Come out!”. Come out from the gridlock of hopeless sadness; unwrap the bandages of fear that impede the journey, the laces of the weaknesses and anxieties that constrain you [...]. By following Jesus, we learn not to knot our lives around problems which become tangled. There will always be problems, always, and when we solve one, another one duly arrives. We can however, find *a new stability*, and this stability is Jesus himself. This stability is called Jesus [...]. And even though burdens will not disappear, there will always be his

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<sup>42</sup> Francis, *Homily of the Holy Mass of the Sunday of Easter, April 16, 2017*.

uplifting hand, his encouraging Word saying to all of us, to each of us: ‘Come out! Come to me!’. He tells all of us: ‘Do not be afraid’.”<sup>43</sup>

And on the vigil of Easter, the Pope said, “In the resurrection, Christ rolled back the stone of the tomb, but He wants also to break down all the walls that keep us locked in our sterile pessimism, in our carefully constructed ivory towers that isolate us from life, in our compulsive need for security and in boundless ambition that can make us compromise the dignity of others. [...] God suddenly breaks in, upsets all the rules and offers new possibilities. [...] Rejoice! Hidden within your life is a seed of resurrection, an offer of life ready to be awakened. That is what this night calls us to proclaim: the heartbeat of the Risen Lord. Christ is alive! [...] Let us go, then. Let us allow ourselves to be surprised by this new dawn and by the newness that Christ alone can give. May we allow his tenderness and his love to guide our steps. May we allow the beating of his heart to quicken our faintness of heart.”<sup>44</sup>

This is why we are together in these days: to support each other, to call each other, with our testimony, by wielding our freedom, to allow ourselves to be surprised and embraced by His presence, so that we will not give up in our sepulcher, as the Pope said. “We are called to decide on which side to stand. One can stand *on the side of the sepulchre* or *on the side of Jesus*.”

I encourage everyone to respect silence, precisely in order to help each other to stand on the side of Jesus. Let’s not take it for granted. If we do not help each other so that the silence is full and not something mechanical, full of striving to recognize His Presence, if we do not exert ourselves to observe silence, these will not be spiritual “exercises” for us. Silence, too, must be born of the flesh for it to become mine.

This year we are dedicating part of the silence that we request during the entrance into the halls to some of the songs of our history. The proposal is born of the desire to not take for granted the gift of singing together. We want each of us – and hence our community – to rediscover the gusto, beauty and educative power of singing together.

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<sup>43</sup> Francis, *Homily at Carpi*, April 2, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Francis, *Homily for the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night*, April 15, 2017.