

*Father Giussani and the anxiety of youth. Man always desires the absolute
Today, the new edition of Realtà e giovinezza. La sfida [Reality and Youth. The Challenge]
(Rizzoli) comes out.*

Here is the new preface by Father Julián Carrón, published by Corriere della Sera.

*Julián Carrón
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PREFACE

by Julián Carrón

When the publisher Rizzoli asked me to write a brief preface to the new edition of *Realtà e giovinezza. La sfida* [Reality and Youth. The Challenge], I reread the introduction written by Father Giussani in 1995. And I was amazed at how much those words apply to our situation today, to the point that it seemed superfluous to add anything else; any other word would have resulted only in distracting the reader's attention from that judgment. Therefore in these few lines I will limit myself to bringing out the value of Father Giussani's reflections in relation to our present context.

Even today, power has an attraction over young people. Without becoming aware of the extent to which power reduces their elementary human needs, how many of them allow themselves to be attracted by a hope that promises to satisfy their hearts' search for fulfillment! Obviously today those promises do not have the same face as in the past (just think of the various totalitarianisms of the 20th century: Nazism, Fascism, Communism); rather they are the promises of populism, of nationalism, or of a strong man, not to mention the new forms of conditioning brought on by social media.

Even if the face of power has changed, surprisingly its capacity to exercise an attraction on the new generations remains the same. In fact, social media—which can be a great opportunity for communication—probably make power even stronger, with a strength that penetrates in direct proportion to our weakness in resisting it.

Sometimes parents are surprised in front of certain attitudes expressed by their children, without realizing that they are the logical consequence of the anguish that they transmitted to them, in the “desperate effort” of assuring them a future without risks. At what price!

Everything conspires to silence their desires, mortifying—almost to the point of canceling—the authentic dimension of the desire of these young people.

Who can offer our youth a real contribution in a situation that is so invasive, where every attempt to put down roots results in complete failure? Only men who become for them such a provocation that they reawaken the fundamental demands that have been reduced by the world around them.

Men who don't give up, as Ernest Sabato testifies: “I have been always scolded because of my need for the absolute, that still appears in my characters. This need passes through my life like a riverbed, or better, like a nostalgia for something that I have never reached [...]. I cannot satisfy this nostalgia, domesticating it by telling myself that this harmony existed in my childhood; I would like that, but it wasn't the case.” The writer continues: “Nostalgia is for me a longing that is never satisfied, the place I have never managed to reach. But it is what we always wanted to be, our desire. It is so true that we don't succeed in living it, that we could believe that it resides outside of nature, were it not that every human being carries this hope of being, this

feeling of something that we lack, within him [...]. Nostalgia for this absolute is like the setting, invisible, unknowable, but with which we confront the whole of life.”¹

Only men who live up to this desire can accomplish the task that education is called to perform, as Father Giussani underlines: “This is the great path for finding again those questions that make man: to encounter people in whom those questions visibly determine a search, open up a solution, provoke pain and joy. Then the mountain rolls away.”

Whoever has had the fortune of meeting people along the way who give him back his own humanity, that nostalgia that constitutes the invisible, but real, background of existence, can hold in his hand the instrument with which to face everything that shows up on the path of life. Only with this longing that is never satisfied, which is called “heart”, can our youth unmask the totalizing claims of every ideology and power, just like what happened to a 16-year-old girl from Catalonia, who grew up in a climate of independent nationalism. This girl read the statement of an adult in reference to the referendum of 1 October 2017–“We are playing for everything!” with the referendum—and she commented in these words, jumping over the veil of ideology: “I found myself in front of a man who bet his whole life on this, a man whose happiness depended on a political decision.”²

This apparently banal episode confirms how right Giussani was: “When [...] the grip of a hostile society closes around us to the point of threatening the vivacity of our expression, and when a cultural and social hegemony tends to pierce our heart, stirring our natural uncertainties, then *the time of the person has come*.”³

The person, as fragile as he is, is irreducible because he is defined by a need for the absolute that no human power can satisfy. “Above all, a phenomenon underlies the vibrant arc of human nature [...], a phenomenon that is the source of every problem: it is the phenomenon of desire. The desire that pushes us to the solution of our problems—desire, which is the expression of your life as men, in the final analysis incarnates the profound attraction with which God calls us to Himself—.”

It is moving to think that God became man to involve Himself with us in this adventure to save our desire. “Christianity becomes agreeable,” that is attractive, “when it is discovered as the best hypothesis in the landscape of human factors.” What a gift Christians can be for men when, due to the grace they have received, they can incarnate in the present that indomitable irreducibility that Christ has introduced in history!

¹ E. Sabato, *España en los diarios de mi vejez*, Seix Barral, Barcelona 2004, pp. 178-179; translation ours.

² “We need a green light”, c1online.org, October 13, 2017.

³ Cited in A. Savorana, *The Life of Father Giussani*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, p. 489.