

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, March 25, 2015**

Reference text: L. Giussani, Why the Church?, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, pp. 27-61.

- *Inno delle scolte di Assisi*
- *Negra sombra*

Many years ago, on a day like today, that irruption into history began that makes it possible for man to be unified. It is necessary to have Our Lady's simplicity of heart to be able to see that this is possible, that everything becomes full of His presence.

Angelus

We had given ourselves the third chapter of *Why the Church?* as the text to work on. In this chapter, Fr. Giussani helps us to understand what the origin of our difficulty in comprehending the meaning of Christian words is, and he offers us a hypothesis. Why is it hard for us? Why do we often feel that this is foreign to us? The origin is "a lack of original attunement" (p. 27) with that which we want to know. He gives the example of Alpine climbers who are already tired before they start the ascent. Because we were born in this historical situation, how patient we have to be to agree to follow a road that allows us not to throw in the towel saying, "This is impossible!" In the meantime, there was the event of Rome, the encounter with Pope Francis, in which we all participated, in one way or another – the majority of us were present in Saint Peter's Square. Since we participated in it, since we had that experience, each of us has the possibility to see what happened. Such a gesture doesn't divert us from School of Community. On the contrary, it becomes a test to understand how it helped us to overcome that sense of extraneousness about which Fr. Giussani speaks. It's not that we have School of Community on one side and the gesture in Rome on the other, as if nothing had happened. Let's begin our work.

It has become clearer to me what the collapse of evidences means, in the sense that, for me, this expression takes on the meaning of losing sight of the truth of things, of the point, every day. In the face of what happens to me every day, I run the risk of letting my interpretation of the facts prevail, filtered through my emotions, my mood, what I think, to the point that I can no longer really distinguish the concrete truth of things from my interpretation. How do I become aware of this chaos? Most of the time, I am not happy, things don't add up. Then, I am no longer interested in being right, or in looking for confirmation of what I think, but I am interested in finding something that saves me, because things the way I see them are not enough. With regard to this, Chieffo's song came to mind: "How bitter, my love, to see things the way I do." That is, they are not enough. Therefore, my question is: How can one get out of this ambiguity? Because I certainly cannot avoid the reaction that things inevitably provoke in me, but I realize that, most of the time, my judgment is limited and doesn't take everything into account.

Did the gesture in Rome help in some way, did it provide any suggestions? Did you have any experiences that helped you to understand what brings you out of this ambiguity?

Yes. The fact that there is an objective point that I can go back to look at.

What is the objective point that you can look at, in order not to remain trapped in the avalanche of interpretations again?

In the case of Rome it was clear, because we were in front of the Pope who showed us...

But this is not enough, because many people participated, but each had his own opinion. If not even a gesture as important as this can save us from interpretations, then what do we need? Look at what happened to you, because this is what helps us to understand.

I reread the chapter of School of Community with a slightly different question. I know this chapter rather well, because I have often used it to understand our cultural situation. However, in recent weeks, I reread it with a more personal question that I would express like this: I tried to understand where and how I start to be affected by that marginalization of God in life that marks the passage from the Middle Ages – in which God has to do with everything, as the chapter says – to the modern age, which is characterized by the difficulty in seeing the religious fact as all-determining. The question is: Where do I see this alternative in myself and in us, who perhaps go to Mass every day, who start our meals with the Sign of the Cross, etc., who have so many reminders? It seems to me that, existentially, a real practical atheism, never expressed in theory, creeps into my life when my relationship with reality and with people is ruled by my projects, instead of being lived as an answer to something that happens. I see a clear alternative in my life between thinking of my time and actions as either a project or an answer. It is the project that tends to completely eliminate the Mystery, because in the end, it superimposes on reality, and especially on people, something that can even be good in my intentions, but that forces the facts of reality (you can feel that something is off) and peoples' freedom. For me, this is perhaps the greatest symptom of my distance from the Mystery, and it reveals my self-sufficient and arrogant attitude, focused on accomplishments and success, not only in the professional environment or in relationships, but even – paradoxically – in religious matters. I have often recognized in myself that this project even gets to the paradox of trying to imagine how I could make a miracle happen, or something that could save someone who is dear to me. Inevitably and inexorably, this project is the greatest source of bitterness and resentment, or at least disappointment, in my life. When I see a completely different alternative, I notice that it is always about days or moments focused on trying to recognize and adhere to the signs of what is happening, following them, perhaps with enthusiasm and even a certain courage. It is following something that happened before. In the end, when this happens, I realize that what prevails is a gaze that is poised to grasp a Presence that I know exists. This alternative between project and answer, between project and sign, is not just about the important moments in life. I realize that it affects every aspect of daily life – work, relationships with my family and friends, how I think about vacations, even how I make a mundane decision. Also, I see that the whole possibility of gladness and fruitfulness is at stake in this alternative. I think that the greatest ally that calls me back to this position, which I know is more promising, is, paradoxically, what I would never want to recognize – that is, a burning awareness of my limit, and, I dare say – I dare to say it because the Pope said it – of my evil.

Why?

Because it brings me back to myself, it brings me back to a true gaze toward myself, and not an image of myself that I pursue; because in my true self there is this experience of limit and evil.

How did this help you to live the gesture in Rome?

This was absolutely the decisive point for me, because I have to say that I arrived precisely with a strong feeling of being inadequate. In the face of this, hearing the Pope say what he said about

mercy and sin – if I am not mistaken, he said: the privileged place of the encounter – was something that threw me wide open to a greater desire again, and reopened me to aim and search for what I found there that was particularly correspondent.

I wrote to you because I really felt the need to do it, and I still feel it very strongly. For me, this is already something not to be taken for granted, because lately – I would say since Christmas – I feel very stuck and blocked by things, by what I do and what happens to me. I feel as if I no longer have needs – hunger, thirst – I feel that I am blandly living a life that, in itself, is not bland, but I don't feel the need for flavor. I recognize that I stay in front of reality in a reduced way – not fruitful, and at times untrue. It is either violent – that is, it tries to grab as much as possible by any means – or it is empty. I feel as if nothing can move me anymore. In the third chapter, third paragraph, third point, it speaks of the humanist and his way of conceiving of a God who is no longer involved with the totality of reality. I will quote it: “The interest which makes this life worthwhile no longer has anything to do with God, since his desires are no longer unified [by God]” (p. 37). When I read this, I was struck, because it is exactly what I am becoming. This is the position that ushers in a partial view of reality, with the resulting fragmentation and abstract image of God. Therefore, I can say that this certainly describes me. I was full of what Christmas had been for me, with the gestures I had participated in, the things that I had done; and living the experience of the Incarnation in a great and lively way had really brought me fulfillment and gratitude. However, all of this had sort of waned. I realized that I no longer felt that great and true fullness. I was no longer holding onto any of the things that I was living, for better or for worse – I was letting myself be carried along by what I was doing, I continue to let myself be carried along by what I do. Then, the other day, I was talking with a priest, and he told me, “Look, all of this is caused by the fact that you have lost the focal point, the center; you have lost love in the sense of the object of loving.” It's true. I no longer have a center, something for which it is worthwhile to live all of the things that I do. I discovered, especially after Christmas, that doing things for someone is the key to really enjoying them. Lacking this sends me off-track. Therefore, the essential question that I want to ask you is this: How can I, weak as I am, get back to the central point? How can I get back to saying that, for me, living is Christ? I am totally convinced that living like that is better, and brings the hundredfold with it. But this “humanism” of mine, about which the School of Community speaks, won't leave me, or I am the one who doesn't want to leave it.

Is there something in your experience that offers you a suggestion for answering your question?

There have been moments, really very many, in which I felt more like I did at Christmas – fulfilled, grateful. I said to myself: I found what I was looking for, or rather, I found what I am looking for. But it was something, let's say, fleeting... Then, at times, I went off-track again, because I was absorbed with myself and thinking of myself.

What does this tell you about yourself?

That I always need a focal point.

This is what surprises us! We often think that the Christian encounter solves things once and for all, and then, once again, one finds himself – as you say – in front of a bunch of pieces that he cannot put back together.

Exactly.

Why does this fragmentation happen?

It happens because there is a lack of engagement with reality. I will quote a passage that struck me as I read the chapter: “The origin of this weakening of an organic mentality towards the religious problem is an option permanently open to the human soul. It occurs when there is a sad lack of committed interest and an absence of curiosity towards reality in its totality” (p. 34). A little earlier it said, “Life, then, is a series of problems, its fabric made up of reactions to encounters that are provocative to a greater or lesser extent. A problem is nothing other than the dynamic expression of a reaction in the face of these encounters. Discovering the meaning of life – or the most pertinent and important things in life – is a goal which is possible only for the individual who is involved with life seriously, its events, encounters, and problems” (p. 33). Therefore, it is really a lack of involvement with reality. This is what I recognize – first – in my actions, in reality. But, unbelievably, it is also what I recognize especially in the charitable work that we do – we help people to find work – because a person who loses his job, even before the great drama of the lack of a salary, loses this connection with reality, this involvement with reality. And this stops him from moving, so much so that the first way to help is to reconnect the person with reality, even if it means working half-days practically for free. About a month ago, we met a young man (21 years old) who had been unemployed for six months. He was stuck, at a standstill. I told him, “Look, we need to get back to being involved with reality, because if we don’t get involved with it, then we no longer move.” He answered, “You’re right! I have an incredible passion for music, I compose and play music, but since I have been unemployed, even with all of the time that I want, I no longer compose and play.” We got back in touch after three weeks – I called him to see how he was doing, and he told me, “I found a job and I started to play music again.”

You had also told me about that mason who couldn’t bring himself not to work. There had been a big mess in his company, and the workers weren’t being paid. While all of the others were on strike, there was one who – after what had happened to him through the encounter with you and your friends – kept working. This went on for days, until he got to a point in the work that was beyond his technical expertise. Then he went to a coworker who was an expert in this (and who was on strike with all of the others) and asked for advice. And this person said to him, “Help me to understand this: why are you working?” “Because something happened to me, and I can no longer not work, I can’t stay here and do nothing. Can you help me to solve this technical problem?” The conversation stopped there. The next day, the mason went to work as usual, and his coworker started to work with him and said, “In 40 years I had never come to work as happy as today!” What reawakens and unifies the “I” like this? Not a titanic effort, but what Pope Francis told us in Rome – and we have to treasure this in order to begin to understand what happens. Morality is not the fruit of an effort, but the moved response to something that happens. Try to imagine: what triggered this curious engagement with reality in the coworker who was not working? The fact of seeing someone who was working. Imagine the internal turmoil in those days, in front of a person who kept working despite the strike. “What’s with him?” “What’s with him?” “What’s with him?” It is this curious engagement with reality that, at a certain point, made him ask, “Explain something to me: why do you keep working?” And the other cannot help but tell him what happened to him in the encounter with Christ, to reawaken him and be able to accompany him in that engagement with the totality of reality, so that life may become this full. This unity is born precisely at this level. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of all of the factors in order to be able to discover, before our eyes, where this possibility of unity of the “I” comes from, which we all desire. Then we can really begin to understand, because this is a desire that

everyone has. It is not necessary – as we sometimes think – to force people. Someone wrote to me that sometimes she feels the need to subdue the other person’s freedom, when someone doesn’t perceive the truth of things like she does. “At times I don’t love the other person’s freedom, I would like to subdue it in front of what I perceive as true. How can we love the other for what he is, even when he doesn’t recognize as true what is true for me, and love the whole truth?” How can we challenge the freedom of the other without subduing it?

A first-year student from my university comes to mind. I am a senior here in Milan, and he is from Sicily like me. While we were studying together, he told me a little about his life. In particular, he was having a hard time because all of his relatives and friends are in Sicily. He lives in an apartment with other students; they aren’t speaking to each other, they had an argument with one of them. In the relationship with us – we studied, we had lunch, we spent time together – little by little, he started to change: he was amazed at everything, at how we eat, study, stay together. So, after a while, I asked him, “Do you want to come to Rome with us to see the Pope?” He immediately said yes. While we were on the bus to Rome, he said, “Listen, I have to tell you something that happened to me yesterday [I had invited him and he had come to School of Community]. Because of the way I saw all of you live in this period, because of how I enjoyed the exam in staying with all of you... You are the only one I know well, but it is as if everyone loved me, I feel welcomed like in a family, and I have never seen anything like this. Because of how I saw all of you staying together, the day after School of Community, in the evening, I went home and waited for the guy I had argued with to ask him how he was doing. In our fridge, each person has his own space with his own things. I had a piece of salmon that was close to the expiration date, and I said to myself: maybe I can share it with him.” And they sat down across from each other and ate together for the first time. When we got to the square, even before the Pope spoke, when Fr. Giussani talked about Andrew going home in the video, I started to cry – because in seeing this friend, I thought: the same thing that happened 2,000 years ago has happened to the two of us. When Fr. Giussani said, “In no uncertain terms, this happened,” the episode I just related to you came to mind: the same house, the same guys, but he went home so full from School of Community that he started to speak to his housemate again, with whom he had almost come to blows. After Rome, I went to Naples. I returned to Milan three days later, and all of my classmates asked me, “How did it go in Rome?” What? I had only spoken of it with that new friend. It was he who, in those two days, had told everyone about it! As soon as he saw me, he asked me for the issue of Traces. Then the other day, we were having lunch with our classmates. It was almost time for the Angelus, and I wondered how to tell the others that I was going to pray. Suddenly, that boy stood up, turned to the others, and said, “Guys, I am going to say a prayer with him, are you coming too?” In speaking of the collapse of evidences, when I look at this new friend, I become aware again of all of the evidences that I take for granted.

In your opinion, why was he able to identify so clearly the different way in which you were living? Because in everything that we live, we all verify what we are reading in these chapters. What allowed him to recognize the life that is the Church through the way in which you were eating, studying, and living?

If I think of how it is for me, I would say it is because he had a need.

Need! Exactly, literally, what Fr. Giussani affirms. It’s not that this friend thought about his need, but it was precisely the need that made him recognize the life! Because of the need that he had, he immediately identified the answer. Where do we see this? In what changed in him, which was not

the result of practice, of effort – here, again, is the origin of morality. This is what we need to recognize in experience now: which facts happen among us that help us to understand what the Pope told us – not as an abstract discourse, but as amazement in front of what happens. Because the fact that a young man, after months in which he doesn't speak to one of his housemates, suddenly has this enormous desire to wait for him and have dinner together – where does this desire come from, if not from the moved response to what had happened to him? And so on. This unity – which is not just unity of the “I,” but also unity with the others – where does it come from? Is it an effort? Is it something that we generate by planning? We, too, have the same experience as the two Apostles who, as they leave Him, “bid each other farewell without saying good-bye” because they “have” the same thing. This is what allows us to understand.

When I came back from Rome, I was getting lost in a thousand analyses of what I had or had not understood in the Pope's speech.

What saved you from the avalanche of analyses, from the rationalism of the interpretations?

The fact that a person who is not in the Movement, whom we had invited to come to Rome with us, wrote this message to me a few days later: “Life is strange. One gets by as best he can, and then he winds up in Rome with real people, and he is super-charged. Then he goes back home and the charge doesn't run out. It's the first time for me. Usually, it was like an injection of antibiotics that dulled the pain, but the disease was chronic and I would relapse. Thank you.” Besides moving me, this helped me to better understand the passage that Pope Francis makes near the beginning: “Everything in our life, today as in the time of Jesus, begins with an encounter.”

An encounter that is not simply something that dulls the pain. That is why when, among us, we only look for a palliative, it is too little. The point is finding a fullness that we never lose.

I am a university student, and I wanted to tell you what I discovered thanks to the encounter in Rome. I didn't go to Rome because my parents didn't want me to go. When my friends proposed it to me, I asked myself at length why I should go, whether or not it was really worth it, because I felt that it wouldn't have been right to go without being sure. After I read your letter and talked it over with friends, I understood that, for me, it would have been very important to go and be present at the audience, because it represented the encounter that I had with the Movement at the university in a totalizing way. Certain of my motives, I decided to propose it to my parents, who, without listening and taking my words seriously, forbid me to go. Even when I insisted, my father kept arguing, “You are too busy. You can't always do everything. You have to make some choices. You spend too little time at home. There is more than just the Movement.” Sad and disappointed, I spent the period before the audience suffocating in this climate, unable to convince my parents, and watching all of my friends get ready to go to Rome. The morning of the encounter, I had to go out, and I asked my father if he could record it. When I got back home, I found him in front of the TV, which was still broadcasting the last part of the audience. A little later, he came toward me and said, “You know, I am a bit sorry for not letting you go.” I was surprised by his words and, after a moment of embarrassment, I asked him why. He answered, “I saw the audience on TV. The Pope said some very beautiful things. I would have liked my daughter to be present. I wanted to apologize, I'm very sorry.” He surprised and struck me so much that I couldn't get a word out! Because it had never happened to me that my father apologized for some decision that he had made about me; by realizing how important that gesture was, he was able to become completely true and human toward me. Later, I watched the recording of the audience, and my father wanted

to watch it again and discuss it with me. For me it was a very meaningful moment, because it made me recognize the value of the audience with the Pope, even if I didn't go. Therefore, paradoxically and unexpectedly, for me, Rome was making that fundamental step at home in the relationship with my father, which I already see growing before my eyes.

Thank you. This is striking, because even something that may apparently seem against us becomes part of the event. In fact, as Chapter 3 says, "Not a leaf falls without God willing" (p. 37). We don't know *a priori* how God will make use even of this circumstance (not being able to fulfill a desire of ours) to manifest Himself in a way that is different from what we imagine. This is the modality through which we see who God is, discovering His relevance to all aspects of life. If we want to eliminate something from reality, from life's circumstances, then we are constantly blocked, because we are not open to the way in which God can surprise us with who He is. We are foolish, because when we don't see that God can use a certain circumstance, then we want to exclude it, because we think that it is irrelevant. Then, at a certain point, we discover that it matters – and how! My friend, this is the way in which the Mystery gave back to you what you thought He had taken away.

I came with you to see the Pope as a beggar for the great, concrete presence, as concrete as a son who encounters his father. From a certain point of view, I was helped, because I have a serious problem right now, and therefore, for me, it wasn't enough to go and have a celebratory mass meeting with everyone.

Not for me either!

On the other hand, I saw how interested you were in going to meet the Pope, and therefore I trusted you. Now I don't want to turn the page, as if to say: let's go back to School of Community, the Rome event is finished, like a parenthesis. I don't want to lose the reaction that the Pope's words caused in me. Therefore, I went over them again, without making any allowances for me or for you. I wanted to know what you understood when the Pope told us to decentralize the charism and be centered on Christ, and how this doesn't contradict what we always say, that is, to identify ourselves with the charism. Because in my life, the charism of Fr. Giussani, which continues in the companionship of the Movement and with you, is the hand of Jesus that touches me personally. Honestly, I don't have another, more direct way to come to Jesus, just that of identifying myself with the charism. I don't know if you have it, or if there is a contradiction.

In answering this question, I can summarize what we lived together. We went to Rome to ask Pope Francis a question: how can we avoid losing the freshness of the charism? It was the question that Pope Francis had asked at the encounter with the ecclesial movements, and it is the most urgent need. How did the Pope answer our question? Since you asked what happened to me, for me, the Pope did not answer only with words: Christ answered us through what He made happen. Each of us has to look at what happened there, because we were not alone in the square – no, we were each present, personally and together, participating in a gesture. So, what happened? Each of us made the verification there. An earlier witness told us about that young man who was able to recognize what had happened to him through the nature of the need he had. In Saint Peter's Square, each of us had the opportunity to recognize the need with which he went there (not the image of the need that he had, but the real need, with the willingness of the heart!) and see what happened. In fact, we can participate in a gesture and see nothing. This is precisely what is written at the beginning of *Why the Church?* It's not enough to see a life like that of the Church to be able to recognize it. The difficulty that we have – says Fr. Giussani – is that if openness, the religious sense, is missing,

then we don't understand, we aren't able to grasp what is happening. Therefore, in front of a gesture like the audience, we all discovered one or another of the three attitudes that we studied in Chapter 2 of the School of Community. There are those who were trapped in the avalanche of opinions, that is, who didn't live anything truly significant that imposed itself on the interpretations. There are those who perceived a sentimental warmth, which, however, was threatened as soon as the newspapers gave their interpretations – as some friends told me when I visited Brazil: despite the experience that they had had, in reading the newspapers the day after, they thought that the only way to preserve that inner warmth was to refuse to read the news! Finally, there are those who participated in a fully human event and were therefore freed from their own rationalism, from their own measure, from their own interpretation, and nothing was able to eliminate the repercussion of what happened, so much so that it still endures today. Each of us had an experience in Rome, and the verification of that experience is what happened afterward, also in the way in which one faced the different interpretations given by people, by those “inside” as well as those “outside” (because there is no difference, there is no “inside” and “outside,” in a certain way). The man born blind lived an event, and Jesus didn't stay with him after the miracle: “Now I will stay here, so that we can face the struggle against the Pharisees together, because they will come to pound you with their interpretations.” No, Jesus healed him, caused him to have an experience for which he could avoid being trapped in the interpretations, or in the preservation of the inner warmth that he had experienced. He threw him into the fray, He left: “You have everything you need to face it all.” Each of us has to look at what happened – if he was confused, if he was trapped, or if, like the man born blind, all of the difficulties, all of the challenges that he had to face truly convinced him more of what had happened to him: “I don't need anything else besides what happened to me.” The man born blind needed only a simple loyalty toward what that Man had done to him: “I couldn't see before, and now I can.” And nothing was able to shift him from this evidence. Then, when each of us is challenged by work or other problems, by an interpretation or life's difficulties, he has to see whether he had an experience like that of the man born blind. Let's verify what really happened in Rome, not just by going back to the experience that we had there, but also by looking at everything that happened afterward, which causes us to understand what happened even more. It is a whole process of understanding what happened in Rome that will bring us to grasp it in all of its depth. Because when the need is clear, one doesn't get confused about what is important. Personally, just the fact of listening to someone speak of Christ like the Pope did, of seeing Him happen again within me with respect to my need, my evil, my inadequacy, made me so grateful and glad that it was really the happening again of that liberation – it is the encounter that frees us – from my concerns, or my rationalism, or my way of looking at reality. On the other hand, there are those who, an instant after the end of the gesture, were already trapped in the interpretations. How can we understand what happened? It is enough for each person to compare what he lived with the paradigm of the encounter. What is the paradigm of the encounter that Fr. Giussani always put in front of us (as Pope Francis also did on March 7th)? Let's read: “But imagine those two who stay there listening to Him for hours and then have to go home. He says good-bye to them and they go their way silently [the first sign that everyone can verify: what causes one to remain silent?], silently because full of the impression they have received of the mystery felt, about which they had had a feeling beforehand and then they had actually felt [second sign: full]. And then they separate. Each of the two goes to his own house [like us – we start to bid each other farewell, we take the train home]. They don't say good-bye, not because they don't say good-bye but because they bid each other farewell without saying good-

bye, because they are both full of the same thing [third sign], the two of them are one, so full are they of the same thing [not because they are together – each one goes to his own house, but they cannot go home without being full of the same thing; they remain together even if each one goes to his own house, because they share what is most dear]. And Andrew goes into his house and puts his cloak down, and his wife says: ‘Andrew, what’s wrong with you? You’re different [fourth sign], what happened?’ [Like our new friend: “What happened to you? We almost got into a fistfight, we haven’t spoken for a month... Why did you wait to have dinner with me and ask me how I am doing?”] Imagine that he burst into tears in her arms, and that she, upset by all this, continued to ask him: ‘But what’s wrong?’ And he holding his wife, who had never felt herself held that way before: he was a different person [fifth sign]. He was a different person! He was the same, but he was different. If anyone had asked him: ‘Who are you?’ he would have said: ‘I understand that I have become someone else... after hearing that person, that man, I have become another person’” (L. Giussani, *Il tempo e il tempio. Dio e l’uomo* [Time and the Temple. God and Man], BUR, Milan 2014, p. 48). Each of us can see what happened. This is the term of comparison. This is the charism! Did the charism happen again in Rome? How did it happen? Because each of us, however he arrived, if he was open, was decentralized with respect to his own concerns, messes, traps, and he was taken hold of again by Christ. Then, it is with this in our eyes that we have to reread the Pope’s speech, in order to understand what it means to “decentralize,” as School of Community has always taught us, as we have always said to each other: “*In manibus nostris sunt codices, in oculis nostris facta*” (St. Augustine, *Sermo sancti Augustini cum pagani ingrederentur*), in our eyes the facts, in our hands the texts. Let’s reread what the Pope said to us in order to be able to understand it, not to see as contradictions things that are absolutely not in contrast, because Christ made happen first what we then have to truly recognize afterwards. Do you understand that if this doesn’t happen, then we do not decentralize? It needs to happen constantly, which is exactly what Fr. Giussani always did with us, because many times, even if we lived the charism – not because we left, but while living the charism! – we often shifted. In 1982, he said: “The other night at a gathering in Milan [I already mentioned this at the Fraternity Exercises in 2013], I observed that in the past years, some 15 years or so [not since two days ago!] [...] all of our efforts at associative, operative, charitable, cultural activity [etc.] had [...] as their aim that of mobilizing ourselves and things [and this took over] [...]. But, at the beginning [...] it was not like this [and we were all there to live the charism, but Fr. Giussani says, “At the beginning it was not like this”] [...] at the beginning [...] we did not build on the values that Christ had brought us, but we built on Christ, naively if you will [we built on] [...] the fact of Christ, and therefore the fact of His Body [...], of the Church. In the beginning we built, we tried to build on something that was happening [...] [and] this position was pure. [...] Because we have in a sense abandoned it, since we have settled on a position that was first and foremost, I want to say, a ‘cultural translation’ rather than the enthusiasm for a Presence, we [precisely because we shifted] don’t know [...] Christ” (L. Giussani, *The Work of the Movement. The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan 2005, pp. 102-103). Thank goodness that Fr. Giussani, by making it happen in front of us – and I think that Fr. Giussani understood something of the charism! – didn’t allow us to lose the charism along the way (the Pope was even too gentle compared to Fr. Giussani, do you understand?). He helped us to have the experience of the charism again, making it happen according to its nature, which is the Christian event. Fr. Giussani constantly introduced us to this, and constantly helped us not to detach ourselves from this, to decentralize ourselves from everything that prevailed, just as Jesus did from the very beginning.

When Jesus sends the disciples out to be missionaries (not to steal), and they come back happy about what they did, He tells them, “Do not rejoice at this, because this does not help you to live. Rather, rejoice that your names are written in Heaven.” Jesus constantly decentralizes them, and we can read Jesus’ entire life with the disciples as a constant decentralizing, up to the last minute, when the Gospel is almost over: “Peter, do you love me?” “Yes,” “Then follow Me.” Peter starts to follow Him, and at the last moment, he says, “And what are we going to do about this John who is following us?” “Stop, Peter, decentralize yourself and follow Me!” This is what we have in front of us now to discover – not by simply reasoning about it, but through mutual witness, what is happening, what strikes us, what He continues to do among us in order to help us understand. It is a working hypothesis that needs to be verified, a surprise to be discovered, personally and together. We will go back to this at the Fraternity Exercises.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, May 20th at 9:30pm. We will skip the month of April because of the Fraternity Exercises. We will start to work on the Introduction together. Until the Fraternity Exercises, we will continue to work on Chapter 3 of the School of Community. These are not two separate things. We have seen how the gesture with the Pope helped us to understand the School of Community and how the School of Community helps us to understand the gesture with the Pope.

Flier with the text of Pope Francis’ speech. As you can see, we have prepared a flier with the text of Pope Francis’ speech at the audience on March 7th. We went to Rome to ask the Pope how not to lose the freshness of the charism, and the Pope answered us. “*Roma locuta, causa finita est.*” Rome has spoken, the matter is definitively closed. The first point is not to add additional words, but to take seriously the proposal that we received and to start living it as a working hypothesis. Only then will we be able to see how the Pope’s words to us illuminate life. This work will also help us to prepare for the Fraternity Exercises. If anyone wants to send a contribution about the experience that he had, or questions that emerged during this work that can be useful at the Exercises, they can be sent to the address set up for School of Community: sdccarron@comunioneliberazione.org, with “Fraternity Exercises” in the subject.

Easter Poster. The text of the Easter Poster is a passage from the March 7th speech. Could it be anything else after what the Pope told us? “Everything in our life, today as in the time of Jesus, begins with an encounter. An encounter with this Man, the carpenter from Nazareth, a man like all men and at the same time different. Let us consider the Gospel of John, there where it tells of the disciples’ first encounter with Jesus (cf. 1:35-42). Andrew, John, Simon: they feel themselves being looked at to their very core, intimately known, and this generates surprise in them, an astonishment which immediately makes them feel bonded to Him.... Speaking about the encounter brings to mind ‘The Calling of St. Matthew,’ the Caravaggio in the Church of St. Louis of the French, which I used to spend much time in front of every time I came to Rome. None of them who were there, including Matthew, greedy for money, could believe the message in that finger pointing at him, the message in those eyes that looked at him with mercy and chose him for the *sequela*. He felt this astonishment of the encounter. The privileged place of encounter is the caress of Jesus’ mercy (Pope Francis).” It is a text to keep in front of our eyes in order to have an image full of amazement at a Presence. It is impossible to look at Matthew’s face without seeing in it the whole gaze that is directed at him.

The Book of the Month for April and May will be *Un'attrattiva che muove. La proposta inesauribile della vita di Don Giussani* [*An Attraction that Moves: The Inexhaustible Proposal of Father Giussani's Life*], BUR, a collection of speeches by many well-known individuals who presented the book *Vita di Don Giussani* [*Life of Father Giussani*].

May the forthcoming Holy Week, which we hasten to begin, put us in this attitude: to identify ourselves with Christ, who came precisely so that our life may not be fragmented. Let us support each other and ask this for each other.

Happy Easter to everyone!

Glory Be

Veni Sancte Spiritus