

*Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, October 23, 2019*

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<https://english.clonline.org/cm—files/2019/10/14/22who—is—this—man—22.pdf>

- *Foi Deus*
- *Noi non sappiamo chi era (We don't know who he was)*

Glory Be

Greetings to all those present and to those who are following us via video connection. We begin this year's work by discussing the Beginning Day, which has made us face the situation in which we are called to live the faith, a cultural context that Umberto Galimberti defines as nihilism. It is not so much a matter of philosophy for insiders because we know how much this problem affects all of us. In fact, often we are at the mercy of everything. To use an image that makes us understand what nihilism is, we are like loose cannons; we are not attached to anything and are therefore at the mercy of circumstances. Faced with this experience, we can't escape by holding forth among ourselves, using ready-made sentences or pat answers, because we would be fooling ourselves. Instead we are here because we greatly value our lives, we take our lives seriously. That is why—following Fr. Giussani—we said that there is no way of responding to nihilism other than with experience. This is something we repeat often, but it is not always understood. Sometimes it takes time to understand.

I will read a message I sent to a friend: “Yesterday evening at the School of Community, I understood more clearly what experience is. As I listened to all these friends, at a certain point I wanted to say, “But don't you understand?! Perhaps for the last to arrive (even if mine was a returning) it is more evident: in this companionship something happens that is humanly unthinkable in the world.” I will make a comparison with what I experienced last year. I was in Africa for 14 months. When I came back everyone I saw said to me something like, “It must have been a great experience ... I wonder about what a beautiful experience it must have been,” and so on. But this is total nonsense – one can do something that is different from his routine, but if the “I” is not involved even 14 months in Africa may not be an experience. It is incredible, however, how those months (and everything that existed before them) are in fact becoming an experience for me now. How is this possible? Because I met all of you. Everyone in the world silences, doesn't look at, doesn't take the “I” seriously, engages in attempts to solve problems with his own strength and according to his own ideas, but something different happens here. In this companionship we take ourselves seriously. For me, this continues to be something from another world! It isn't that we are all better people, that shortcomings or hardships disappear, or that we are all in harmony. Yet, something happened to all of us and to each one of us personally that took hold of us, that changed us. Finally Someone told us, “That indomitable heart you have, with all its desire, I gave it to you and it is not a mistake. You are not a mistake; that desire to be loved that nothing succeeds in fulfilling is not a misfortune that happened to you.” After hearing that, one can experience, have

the experience of that intelligence of the sense of things that frees him from his preconceived ideas, plans, and calculations. This understanding of the sense of things throws you wide open to the wonder of the reality that happens—beyond you, but first and foremost for you—by virtue of an encounter in the flesh—objective, true, which awakens your heart, that is, your “I.” How do you see that this is true? Because it changes you, it introduces in you a newness that you couldn’t have achieved even with the greatest effort. This is the grace that I am living, and I am aware of this newness in me at work, in my relationships, and with my parents.” Thanks.

Thank you, dear. “Even 14 months in Africa may not be an experience.” Why? Because the “I” may be missing, you said. When the “I” is missing, we are tossed about everywhere, and then we need to go back to a place where we can take it so seriously that we begin to treasure and take stock of what we have experienced. What happens when one doesn’t realize what he is experiencing? He engages in—this is the way in which you describe nihilism—attempts to solve problems with his own strength, which doesn’t solve anything. Each of us, whatever the hypothesis with which we face the questions of life, must verify what he really needs to live and to respond to the possibility of being tossed about everywhere, and understand what doesn’t help. And you, precisely because you have verified that your attempts didn’t bear the fruits you wanted, were able to grasp the difference in what you found when you came back from Africa: only a place where you take the “I” seriously changes you, a place where you experience what that newness introduces into you, a newness that not even the greatest of efforts can produce. If we are attentive to what this place proposes to us we can truly treasure the fact, as we said this summer and repeated at Beginning Day, that “the journey to truth is an experience.” Is there anyone who has learned this?

At Beginning Day you asked the question, “Is it really true that the journey to truth is an experience?” This question forced me to do some personal work to identify in my life the truth of what you proposed to us. Some events in my life helped me in this work. One evening, with a group of friends, we were talking about life, and one in particular spoke about his work and how he works happily in the awareness that the workplace is a piece of reality where the Mystery is present in his life. Hearing that I said to myself, “Beautiful, desirable!” It struck me in a positive way. Yet, an instant later it was already slipping away, as this thought prevailed in me, “But I am not like that,” and all of me strained in an effort to be adequate to what had struck me. I felt I was suffocating. Luckily another friend spoke and asked a simple question, “What do the things we just heard say to me, to us? What happened to us with these words, even if we don’t have the awareness that he has?” With that question in my heart, I didn’t sleep much and I realized that—as you said at the Beginning Day—when I was listening to that friend speak to us, in that very moment, I was completely taken hold of by what was happening before my eyes: Christ was there for me in that friend who had been “seized”—as you said—“to his core.” How strange life is! Christ happens and I let Him slip away, always putting my reactions, my moods first. But Christ doesn’t give up and immediately comes back through a friend who doesn’t let you go to bed in peace, who doesn’t allow you to miss what is happening. The immediate consequence that I experienced was to realize that something had happened that evening, and that when it happens, it doesn’t allow you to reduce yourself to your limits and inconsistencies. In fact, in His happening I discovered that my heart is irreducibly made for Him. This awareness that the heart is irreducible gave me great peace, and I no longer suffocated.

As we said at Beginning Day, things can happen, but we let them slip away. The Gospels speak of facts, of miracles that happened in front of everyone, but many times people were not amazed like Jesus was amazed, like when in front of the centurion He said, “*In no one in Israel have I found such faith*” (see Mt 8:5-12); that is, no one able to recognize who Jesus was like the Roman soldier did. What you say about yourself can happen to us too: it isn’t that something doesn’t happen, but an instant later we let it slip away. Thank goodness the Mystery still has pity on each of us and takes hold of us again. What happened while your friend spoke? If we let it slip away, if we don’t engage in personal work, if we are not willing to accept any hint that comes from reality, little by little everything that happens will be reduced to nothing and we will end up at the mercy of ourselves and of everything that surrounds us. For this reason, as we said before, our presence is required, that is, our “I” must be involved. It isn’t that things don’t happen but if after having intercepted them a moment later we let them slip away, we remain alone with our attempts, which are unable to take hold of us because they are too fragile. When I let them slip away, when I look away from what happens before my eyes, I immediately feel the effect: I suffocate. Do you see the red lights that appear as a result of this experience? On the other hand, when I intercept what is happening and become aware of it—even if I am a disaster as much as I was before—I begin to experience peace, as you said, “a great peace...I no longer suffocated.” There are signs through which we can realize when we are not intercepting something that is there and when instead, simply, without having to do who knows what, we recognize that it is the Lord because something changes: we no longer suffocate. In a situation like the present one, being tossed about everywhere, the challenge is this: does faith stand up to nihilism, does Christianity hold up?

Friday was a very hard day. With the whole week weighing on my shoulders (work, children, commitments ...) I was pretty tired. I had only one last effort to make – taking one of my children to the gym. There, by chance, I met a young woman I know because her daughters are in class with my children in our town. We started chatting and I began to complain about the week, until she interrupted me and asked, “Do you happen to know a good priest?” I was a bit taken aback because we know each other: she knows that I belong to the movement and I know that she is a nonbeliever. Then she looked at me—I was speechless—and said, “You know, I can no longer pretend it’s nothing, now it occurs regularly, I can’t keep at bay a desire to find meaning in my life. I abandoned the faith that my parents had communicated to me in my youth because it didn’t hold up. Sometimes I try to stifle these questions, but after a while they come back. I realize I have a huge need to be loved; the things I have are no longer enough for me.” I was amazed, moved, and then I began to talk about the journey I am making, including Beginning Day. While I was telling her, “You know, Fr. Carrón started by quoting a psychoanalyst, Galimberti,” she interrupted me and said, “Of course! It is nihilism! I am right at that point!” I continued to tell her about my Christian companionship and she said, “I would like a friendship like that.” I told her, “I would love so much a friendship like that with you!” She replied, “I know, that is why I told you about this.” The next day, around 6:00 p.m., I gave her the Traces issue with the text of Beginning Day, and the next day, at 10:00 a.m., she saw me and said, “I have already read it! Thanks! It is helping me a lot!” Then I invited her to that evening’s School of Community, and I was struck by the fact that she immediately answered without hesitation, “Yes, I am coming!” For me what happened was a huge gift because seeing a woman with such purity and loyalty made me want to be like her, to have a heart like that. It is strange, because I was very tired, but after that

meeting I was reinvigorated and had enormous energy. I am very grateful because I understand that the grace that happened to me when I met Jesus through the movement is really a treasure. I realize that I am carrying a great treasure and that someone is certainly waiting for it.

We too, as you said at the beginning, can be at the mercy of everything—a hard day, the week with all its complications—and come across a friend who is in the same situation and who can no longer live without meaning. This is really comforting, because it means that we don't need anything but to come to terms with our humanity. As wretched as we are, we need not live up to anything—we who have met Christ and the other who is looking for a meaning in life. As you can see, the last person to arrive can become a gift for us and we for her because we are all eager to find something that takes hold of us. And when we find it, the openness of the person emerges immediately, as you said: a purity and loyalty that are moving. Many times we are taken aback by the people we have just met, as happened to Jesus in the Gospel upon meeting the centurion: “*In no one in Israel have I found such faith.*” Today as then! We are all fellow travelers, and the last people to arrive make us aware of what we are living, even through *Traces*—that *Traces* that we often don't even browse! We don't even read it, while that friend read it in less than 24 hours, which tells us how often we waste the gifts that the Mystery gives us. What happened to you can happen to any of us. Nihilism, that is, the lack of meaning, paradoxically facilitates our intercepting someone in whom we see something happen. Of all the people around her she asked you about the priest out of a desire for a relationship that could pull her out of her situation that lacked meaning.

In this regard, a friend asks, “But is authority a person, a person with a first and last name?” If we pay attention to how the things we just heard happened, it isn't that that young woman encountered something abstract, she met a person with a first and last name, a friend in whom she saw something that interested her. Our friend continued by asking, “Is it necessary to have a particular affective affinity?” All these problems in which we get stuck (as if it were necessary for us to force reality to conform to our image of it) disappear when we are really in need: everything is easier if we have a purity and loyalty in front of what happens. That is why those in whom we see that nihilism is defeated are authorities, whatever the situation in which we find ourselves or the mistakes we make (like Mary Magdalene, the sinful woman). None of that matters; all the things that for us represent an objection are not obstacles. Not the fact that you left or distanced yourself for a while, that you are still searching, that you are distracted, etc. The only thing that matters is being loyal, is the purity with which you stand before the modality through which the Mystery comes to meet you now. The experience we have in the present makes us understand even more the scope of the Gospel stories – it amazes me that those stories we mentioned at Beginning Day become the canon, the paradigm, through which we discover the newness that Christ introduced into our lives.

In my recent work on the Beginning Day, the whole thing you explained with the example of Mary Magdalene struck me very much. At the end of p. 6 you said, “The difference is crystal clear when we happen upon a person who is entirely seized, to the core of her being. This is faith.”

That is what Jesus told her, “*Your faith has saved you*” (see Lk 7:36-50).

I asked myself what faith was for me, and I realized that it has always been a matter, let's say, of a rock-steady affirmation and then of some things to do, to practice (the School of Community, prayers, Mass), and I have always been satisfied with this. But over time I have grown tired of

living certain things without leaving space for my entire humanity. It struck me very much how you connect faith with affection, with the impetus for something, for someone, as it happened to Mary Magdalene. Then a question arose: What does it mean to live the faith? Why is it related to affection? I live moments of affection when we have dinner with my fraternity group, and I live a sincere affection with some friends. I live, I give myself to certain gestures, like that of the “Happening” we organized with our community in September (which gave me a glimpse of a “more” and allowed me to deepen some unexpected, beautiful friendships). Is this enough? Is this living the faith?

Leave these questions open. We are not in a hurry to close them up with a definition, because, as you have seen—what you describe is striking!—many times Christianity is reduced to doctrine; in your words, a “rock-steady affirmation,” or to ethics (as you said, “some things to do”). This is the normal standard to which Christianity is reduced. “And I have always been satisfied with this,” you said. But now you realize that this is not enough for you! In my opinion, it is very interesting that when we find ourselves in front of the passage of the Gospel we quoted at Beginning Day, we make it into the canon, the paradigm for judging: Mary Magdalene lived something that we, with all our “rock-steady affirmations” and all our things to do, miss. The Gospel finally begins to speak, without great speeches, but simply through certain stories the nature of Christianity is communicated, the nature that so often eludes us, but that—thanks to God, and because now your humanity is no longer satisfied with a reduced Christianity (do you understand what a decisive role your humanity has?)—strikes us and we desire. That is why I say that the situation in which we live can become a wonderful opportunity to realize how much we reduce Christianity to doctrine or ethics. On the contrary, for Mary Magdalene Christianity wasn’t first and foremost a doctrine or ethics, but rather being seized to her core by the presence of One who obviously made certain statements and did certain things. First of all it was One who seized her to her core! We can repeat these things just in words, but in the end we reduce Christianity to doctrine and ethics. Instead, Christianity is the event of the Word (the doctrine) made flesh. If He doesn’t become flesh, He won’t take hold of me down to my core! To say that it has to do with my core, with the depths of me, doesn’t mean reducing one’s faith to sentimentality, but rather recognizing that if it doesn’t reach that point, we are at the mercy of everything that surrounds us. It was enough to put in front of everyone on the path we are following a passage of the Gospel, which began to speak to our lives as it didn’t speak before. Think of how many times you had already listened to it, how many times we had already heard the passage about Mary Magdalene! Yet now it speaks to us with a power that makes us discover our reduction of Christianity that you described in crucial detail: a “rock—steady affirmation” and “things to do.” We can be committed, we said at Beginning Day, to doing the things proposed by our companionship and to repeating affirmations among ourselves, but Jesus’s question will remain forever, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8)—faith in the sense we are speaking of, that is, as being seized by His presence. This is striking and in fact, what is faith? Faith is recognizing a presence that attracts you like a magnet, that glues you to Him, that takes hold of you down to your core. Then, what is needed to understand whether this is enough?

Beginning Day made the question of what it means “to be generated” and “to be sons and daughters” become alive in me. The first struggle I had to face was that of not reducing this question to an image of “who is a father to me” or to a psychological or sentimental question.

Doing this was all too simplistic, which I became aware of because it didn't generate in me that freedom and that gladness which are so desirable.

See how the signs that something is wrong immediately appear? The image we come up with doesn't generate freedom and gladness.

On the contrary, it almost complicated my life more. Therefore, I agreed to begin to do the work of looking at experience and judging it.

“Looking at experience” is hard work! Let's not take it for granted, since we continue to make the same mistakes. We have been here “for ages” and we continue to make the same mistakes because we don't learn anything from experience.

I wanted to see where and how the Lord would decide to let Himself be recognized again, alive and present in my life. I will tell you two things that happened. The first is that about a month ago I found myself relating my experience together with two Muslim women at a gathering on the theme “Women of peace, solidarity and dialogue.” After a first round of presentations, I talked about myself and my experience and showed some pictures as well. The younger Muslim woman thanked me and said about the people smiling in those pictures, “You can see that it is a real smile.” The second woman, who until then had spoken in sociological terms and according to certain intellectual categories, felt free to say, “Perhaps now it is better that I tell you about myself.” A true encounter took place among the three of us. As I got in the car I said to myself, “Look at what Jesus can do when He becomes a presence among us! He changes our hearts (!) and He makes our relationships more human. Only He can do that!” I returned home with a renewed affection and freedom, which I carried with me at work. In fact, the second thing I want to tell you about happened at school. At the beginning of the school year an Arab mother came to school wearing a niqab, the black veil that covers the whole body and leaves only the eyes uncovered. You could feel that everyone was uncomfortable, and honestly I was affected by such difference too. In the following days, in my conversations with this mother about some problems her son had, I looked her in the eyes, even with a certain tenderness, wanting to go beyond that appearance that was so distant from me. As I looked at her, I thought of how many times Jesus did this with me: He looked me in the eye and came to look for my heart! I started wishing I could look at her in that way too. One morning, while we talked, she unexpectedly lifted her veil and showed me her young face. I was deeply struck and I said to myself, “Who are You, Jesus, that when you happen in me as a memory You also make the other person, who is so different, freer to be herself and to reveal her face?” I rediscovered myself even more as a daughter of His tenderness and faithfulness in my life. My student also started to change. It is really true that in order to understand what it means to be sons and daughters we must not spend time reasoning about it, but instead, it is enough to simply let ourselves be surprised and generated by what happens and by the One Who happens. It is a beautiful beginning of the year! Thanks.

This is impressive because, as we see, nothing special is needed. We can find ourselves in this multicultural society meeting people who are totally different from us, as we are seeing this evening, and as it was in Jesus's time when He came across a centurion or a Samaritan. (He healed ten lepers, but only a Samaritan returned to thank Him.) What shows us that this young mother, even in her difference, participates in what Jesus introduced into history? The fact that she begins to be herself in a way that you least expected – the fact that a person feels so comfortable in front of you to uncover her face is really unforeseeable. She likely had a stereotype of a Western Christian, just as we can have one of a Muslim woman. Yet, at a certain moment, the stereotype

did not keep her from being struck by a gaze that made her feel free to be herself to the point of “revealing” herself to you, which caused you to be amazed at her. This says more than anything we can say with all our confident proclamations; it says more than all the difficulties we can bring up with the possibility of communicating the faith in the multicultural situation in which we live. Faced with facts like this, there are no words to add, because we experience with amazement that when we let ourselves be generated by the gaze that Jesus introduced into the world which reaches us through our history, we too begin to generate, helping others to become themselves. The Gospel doesn’t tell us about how the story of the centurion with Jesus and the Mystery continued. From that moment on it was the centurion’s responsibility to live in light of what had happened, and Jesus doesn’t seem too worried about it—the Gospel doesn’t say that He revisited it saying, “What will happen after the miracle I have performed?” Jesus seized that moment of the centurion’s openness and put it in front of everyone: “In no one I have found such faith,” such great recognition of His presence. For this reason, if we really let ourselves be struck by what we see happening in our way of entering into and looking at relationships with others, we can find an answer to what we are seeking. Yet, is this answer able to withstand the test of time? Who saw in his own experience that it does so?

“Who is this man?” I believe that this question—better, the fact that one happens to ask himself this question under the current circumstances—is the only possibility for understanding what withstands the test of time. When, like a blind man, I didn’t listen to someone who almost without even thinking about it made me ask, “Who is he?” I felt that sooner or later everything could end, even the sweetest love or the dearest friendship. I had to wander around, sometimes seemingly without meaning. Then I realized that my wandering was for the purpose of looking for a meaning. In my past I had asked the question “Who is this man?” many times and strangely or miraculously it didn’t leave me, even if lately it has been underground, hidden by something in me that I don’t recognize. This question is uncomfortable, at least for me, because asking it to oneself is the hard work of an adult, an undertaking that doesn’t need to be rewarded with anything—no front row position or worldly or religious gratifications, which in any case make no difference. In my opinion, asking oneself “Who is he?” is the hard work of an adult because it means recognizing a love that in some way is already everything. I will relate to you something to explain why I said this. My brother and sister-in-law have become part of the movement as adults. In my 30 years in the movement I never spoke to them about it! They turned to my wife about a particular matter and she invited them to your School of Community. After three or four years they joined the Fraternity and now participate in our small Fraternity group. When there was the annual meeting of the new members of the Fraternity, they returned looking like John and Andrew, and from what they said—it was obvious to all of us who listened to them—there was no doubt that they had met something different. This all happened at a time when I thought there was nothing new for me anymore—everything seemed to me a mixture of too many words already heard, too many controversies, too much presumption of already knowing, both in me and in others ... How dull! In short, I was pretty bored. Instead those two came back and said, “When the meeting ended we didn’t want to leave because we felt so understood and loved !!!” Looking at them I asked myself, “What do they see that I no longer see?” Then at Beginning Day I realized that they are an authority for me; without any particular prerequisite of being “born and raised CL members”, at that moment they were an authority for me in the sense in which Giussani explains it: “Authority is the place where the

verification that compares the perception, the needs of one's heart, and the response given in the message of Christ, is clearer and simpler, and therefore is more peaceful" (p. 10). *This is the reason we are a group of Fraternity, and when we meet there are neither formalisms nor right ways of belonging; we help each other with great freedom to enjoy the presence of Christ among us and above all to ask ourselves, "Who is this Man?" Even if I continue to wander around, I am more and more glad, because I feel a bit like the man born blind: you can tell me what you want, but now I am glad and before I wasn't. I must also thank you because in these 15 years, despite the fact that we don't know each other, I have really felt accompanied by you in following Giussani. Thanks.*

What do your brother and sister-in-law see that you no longer see despite having been here for 30 years? You could have beat yourself up, but instead you went along with them, you simply followed them. Instead of judging yourself for how "blind" you were, you followed with simplicity the way in which the Mystery came to take you back. This is authority, a person in whom one sees more clearly that what one wishes for happens, as Fr. Giussani said. For this reason, if one has simplicity of heart—no matter how one feels—one lets oneself be generated by the last to arrive because the very last person to arrive is given to him to enjoy the Presence that many times we are no longer able to see and recognize. Since we no longer see Him, the Mystery puts us in front of someone made of flesh and blood in which He makes Himself manifest. What more can one do than that? For this reason, when one becomes aware of it, he cannot say anything else, just as you did not. The blind man answered, "Leave me alone, before I didn't see and now I see." Before you weren't happy, and now you are.

One person wrote me who sometimes seems to be afraid of having a father, an authority like the one just described. It is not automatic that someone will react as you did before your brother and sister—in—law because in front of an authority one can begin to measure oneself: "What will the other think? What will he say about me?" asking himself whether he is adequate, if he is up to it, instead of letting himself be struck by the fact that right there, in those two who are speaking, the victory of Christ is happening. It is this reoccurrence of His victory that again purifies our way of looking, makes us free again and overcomes our fear of what the other will think of us. That is why we must be attentive to experience: Who is really a father?

Coming home from Beginning Day, my heart was full of what I had heard and of what had happened. At a certain point, however, I started thinking about the people I meet every day by chance or at work, and this question came to me suddenly, "Why do I have the problem of authority? Life is already full of problems, why do I have to have this problem too?" Right from the start this question moved me and filled me with silence, as happens when something or someone forces you to stop and look. If the question moved me, the answer made me—and still makes me—tremble, like when you feel overwhelmed by something huge; the answer is that authority is the way God made Himself known to me, is the method by which He entered my life. He could have decided not do this and yet He did. And He did it with a specific face (and not another) in one place (this and not another). Being aware of this almost takes my breath away. How it makes me tremble and what gratitude I feel! Over time, I am realizing that all of reality can be an authority and that the mystery can meet me in the strangest and most unpredictable ways. I recognize His unmistakable traits from the fact that life always begins speaking to me again. However, there is a consistent point at which I have a particular experience of authority, in which I live and relive

that explosion of freedom that Fr. Giussani speaks of, and this point is you, or rather the experience of faith that you live. If I think of this period of my life, what strikes me and affects me most are your obedience and love for reality. I know that this is possible only if one is in relationship with the One Who generates him. Thanks.

May I ask you a question? Someone wrote to me, echoing your words that “all reality is authority.” But then, wouldn’t it be enough to live a relationship with the reality that is already an authority? Why do you need to add a first and last name? Do you do it, even a little, out of your own personal interest as a form of “personalism”?

This is what happens to me: I have moments in which I recognize an authority, but then ...
“But then”?

Then I fall back into my lessons to prepare, in my daily things to do, I reduce everything to all the things I have to do.

I thank you for this answer because often one doesn’t realize that when he finds a presence, as we have heard from the stories recounted this evening, his way of being in reality changes and everything becomes a sign, an authority, we could say. However, sooner or later a “but,” a “however,” appears. Yet there is something before the “but,” as Fr. Giussani always taught us in quoting Guardini, “In the experience of a great love [...] everything that happens becomes an event within its scope” (*L’Essenza del Cristianesimo* [The essence of Christianity], Morcelliana, Brescia 1980, p. 12). A little while ago during dinner a friend told me that, having fallen in love, everything speaks to her more. In the story of a great love she begins to look at things that usually bother her with a new, different look. But, as you said, the question I have posed is the challenge that Fr. Giussani throws at us: to verify whether this love lasts over time when there is no one who generates us. For this reason he states, “No one generates unless he is generated.” If that doesn’t continue to happen, reality no longer speaks to me like that, reality no longer becomes authority, it no longer becomes new, as we said. To allow oneself to be generated it is necessary to find a father, whoever he is, no matter the first and last name. It isn’t enough to have been generated in the past, it is necessary to be generated now, because when it no longer happens we return to the old routine in our relationship with reality. Alone with our abstractions, we can’t escape nothingness, nihilism. A “father,” a friend told me this week, “is one who rekindles a level of the truth of my life and tears me away from daily banality.” That is why we need a first and last name. Everyone needs to identify this authority, because here the nature of Christianity is truly played out. Fatherhood, authority, said Fr. Giussani at the Beginning Day, is quite foreign to the common mentality, so much so that anything that identifies with it runs the risk of being accused of personalism. And yet, without fatherhood, Christianity becomes abstract; we see this because it no longer takes hold of us. For this reason, I think that the particular situation in which we live, this nihilism in which we find ourselves living, is paradoxically an amazing opportunity (as we have seen) to recognize that a “rock-steady affirmation” and “things to do” don’t take hold of us and that a reduction of Christianity to this is not enough for us to live. We can recognize this only when what happens is described in the canon, in the paradigm that is the Gospel, that is, only when we find ourselves in front of someone made of flesh and blood do we recognize the presence of Jesus who seizes us to our core. Only then is Christianity present, and only then does it show itself as a new event that solves the question of life. If it doesn’t seize us all the way to our core, Christianity cannot be an answer that totally takes hold of us. When it happens it totally seizes us indeed!

When this year, in this unexpected year, I received my Fraternity registration card at home, I was moved, because I truly felt like a daughter. I felt enveloped in a paternal look, a look full of certainty. When I heard about authority at Beginning Day, I couldn't help thinking of all the people I have met and meet (as I did this evening) who continue to contribute to that certainty in me. However, there is a new step that I am taking on this journey, which for me has started recently, at least apparently. I am realizing, I am becoming aware that everything that happens to me constitutes me, that is, it is truly part of me. I recognize that this isn't a feeling, not even an emotion, but rather a way of being, an attitude. It is like everything is multiplied in everyday life and I can't leave anything out anymore, I can't let go of anything. This changes the 24 hours of my days, in which now time and all things seem multiplied by the different intensity with which I experience them. A few days ago, something happened that may seem trivial. I met someone and began asking each other questions so that we could get to know each other. I realized—and this surprised me—that by speaking to and answering this person, talking about friendship, relationships, anything, even the most trivial things, I couldn't leave out anything I have met, I couldn't leave Christ out of any aspect of my life! To each of his questions I answered by describing what I was living, and he said to me, "This is interesting! That is interesting!" even if I wasn't speaking of Christ explicitly. This is incredible because in the past I might have put the religious question aside for fear of being labeled. I didn't mention it explicitly, but now I can't avoid it, I can't do without it, in part because it makes me feel more myself. I realize that those in front of me, those who listen to me, are almost more surprised than I am and are thinking to themselves, "Uhm, what is this woman talking about?" This is a bit like what happened and continues to happen to me when I look at people who are totally taken by Him. I realize that now I am being taken by Him, and this changes life, it multiplies everything! It seems to be always Sunday. This is living! I identify this as an experience. I just wonder how I can always recognize Him in my days, how I can not lose this awareness. I am afraid that all of this will suddenly disappear or that difficulties may cause me to no longer see it.

Don't worry. He said to you, "I am with you always until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20), so He will never disappear. The only thing we need to ask is the simplicity of heart to recognize Him when He happens, like you are doing, because that is what really makes us sons and daughters. It is interesting when one realizes that he is generated. Nothing of what he lives is lost, and everything is invested by the newness that Christ introduced into the world. You can't talk about the things of your life without talking about this fact. It isn't necessary to add the word "Christ," especially since so many times people think they already know what Christ is. People are surprised to see the fascinating newness that a person is living. They experience a correspondence to their expectations that can speak to them of Christ more than if one said the name they think they already know. This is the great challenge we have before us, each of us: to let ourselves be generated, so that anyone who runs across us in the relationships and circumstances of life can see someone in whom nihilism has been defeated. This is the clearest witness of Christ that we can give: a place where Christ wins.

Therefore, let's continue to keep the Beginning Day text in front of us. Our work on it doesn't end this evening, even though we begin to address the next text. This work on Beginning Day will determine the course of the year, as we have seen up to today that last year's Beginning Day was decisive for us. We don't close this matter here because we still have to understand what this

fatherhood, this being sons and daughters, mean so that we can be ever more seized and magnetized by Christ present.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, November 20, at 9:00 p.m.

We begin work on the new book, *Generating Traces in the History of the World* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), which Fr. Giussani wrote together with Stefano Alberto (known as Don Pino) and Javier Prades.

This text contains Fr. Giussani's reflections on the Christian experience in dialogue with those responsible for the movement during the 1990s. These contributions marked the way and accompanied the life of the movement in those years. Fr. Giussani characterized this book as "new traces of the Christian experience," referring to one of the first texts of the movement—*Traces of Christian Experience*. It will be a great help to us in continuing the path we have taken in recent years. We started from *The Religious Sense* that constitutes us; we then reflected on what lies *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, which has taken hold of our lives. Finally we worked on *Why the Church?*—the continuation of the event of Christ in time and space. Now we will see what all of this has to say to our daily life. During the last year we stood before Fr. Giussani's witness "*Alive means Present!*" We accepted the challenge posed by his question, "*What withstands the test of time?*" at the CLU and Fraternity Exercises, to which many of you contributed from your own experience. At Beginning Day we underlined that experience is "the key word for everything." Fr. Giussani said that "it was through a true, objective experience that men and women became aware of the presence of God in the world" (BD 2019, *Who is this Man?*, p. 4), as we have seen this evening also. It is by encountering a presence that the question arises in us, "Who is this Man?" and the new book is part of this journey. With *Generating Traces in the History of the World* we will be able to further deepen the content of Beginning Day. In fact, we will see the Christian experience that Fr. Giussani witnesses to us and proposes to us and his concern to reaffirm the method of the movement, which is a rediscovery of the Christian event as an encounter. Having seen how many times along the way we have fallen into our reductions of Christianity, Fr. Giussani's insistence is a sign of his being a father to us. For this reason he said, "To be recognized, God entered man's life as a man, with a human form, so that man's thought, imagination, and affectivity were, in a way, 'blocked', magnetized by Him" (p. 17). If this doesn't happen, we don't know Him.

We will also see the full extent of Fr. Giussani's understanding of faith as he leads us deeper into its meaning: "This is the victory that conquers the world: faith"; that is, the recognition of His present presence, a presence that takes hold of you down to your core and continues over time through the Church – the way Christ is present here and now in history, "the companionship of those whom Christ has identified with himself," which is manifested in history as a new people, "a place that is the road" (as we said in the Fraternity Exercises).

The work until November 20 on *Generating Traces* will be on the Introduction and the two initial points of the first chapter ("The Christian Event As An Encounter"), that is, the points titled "Andrew and John" and "God's Method."

It is possible, as usual, to send questions and brief contributions to: sdccarron@comunioneliberazione.org. For those outside of Italy these need to be submitted by

Friday evening before the meeting (because it is necessary to translate them), and for Italians by Sunday evening, with a cell phone number so it is possible to contact you.

The book of the month for November and December will be: *Il cuore del mondo* by John Henry Newman (Bur, Collana Biblioteca dello Spirito Cristiano). The book collects some of Newman's writings in *The Heart of Newman: A Synthesis*, Ignatius Press, 1997, but is not a translation of that work.

Reading this book will allow us to become acquainted with the thought and faith of Cardinal Newman who, as you know, Pope Francis proclaimed a saint on October 13th. He anticipated so many of the things we heard this evening about how to live the faith.

The movement proposes that everyone support two gestures: first of all the National Food Collection Day, which will be held on Saturday November 30 in response to the World Day of the Poor proposed by the Pope for Sunday November 17. In his message, with the words of Psalm 9 ("The hope of the poor will never be disappointed"), the Pope invites us to restore hope lost in the face of injustice, suffering, and insecurity.

The other gesture is the AVSI Tents Campaign, which this year will be entitled: *Giòcati con noi. Generazioni Nuove, protagoniste del mondo* (Go all in with us. New generations and protagonists of the world). It will support projects in Syria, Lebanon, Mozambique, the Amazon, Venezuela, Italy, and various sponsorship programs.

The Food Collection and the AVSI Tents are two simple gestures that educate us to understand what charity is in the fatherhood we receive from our companionship, a fatherhood that helps us widen our horizon to the needs of the world. They are simple gestures that touch the fundamental needs of every man, and we can offer them to everyone with whom we share life every day, so that curiosity and hope can be reborn in them.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Good evening everybody!