

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón  
via video connection from Milan, February 24, 2021**

Reference text: L. Giussani, S. Alberto, and J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010, chapter 2, point 9, "The Persuasive Way in Which the Holy Spirit Intervenes in History—Charism," pp. 78–88.

- *Errore di prospettiva* [Error of perspective]
- *Tu sei venuto dal buio* [You came from darkness]

*Glory Be*

Good evening everyone! We begin our work on the School of Community, which will be centered on a theme that is so familiar to us: the charism.

Nothing makes it easier to understand what the charism is—not as a definition or as a discourse, but in terms of experience—than to observe its dynamics in a person who has recently discovered it.

*Good evening everyone. Thank you for inviting me here tonight—for me it's the first time. Before 2020 I didn't know Communion and Liberation. I met a coworker who was part of it, but even before I knew that detail, I immediately felt a strong connection with her without knowing why. I was wondering why, because at the time she was almost a stranger to me. What struck me the most was that she didn't treat me as a stranger, didn't judge the fact that I had nothing to do with the faith, nor did she ever try to force me to believe. One day, like a bolt out of the blue, she invited me to attend the School of Community that was to be held that evening, and I thought, "How is it possible for a person like her to invite someone like me?" At that moment it seemed to me that a miracle had happened—as a total stranger I was welcomed into a companionship as if I were one of the sisters. Each time I met them, I experienced the charism of that companionship that was becoming part of my life: I met people who represent a large family, who take care not only of themselves, but also of those who come from outside their group. Little by little I began to realize that God had chosen that person to communicate to me the gift He wanted to give me, that is, an encounter with Him that I hadn't had for a long time. The extraordinary thing is that He chose to do it in the most human and natural way possible, leaving me free to choose again the gift that in the past I had many times not welcomed. I was telling everyone that I was distant from God, but He kept drawing me to Himself through her, without chains, without constraints or an entrance pass, but only through the love transmitted to me by that family of people who were no longer strangers. We are all different, but united by the fact that we are children of God and therefore brothers and sisters, which erases any kind of foreignness between us already at the first meeting. This is precisely the meaning of the charism of the movement of Communion and Liberation: it is a great family that welcomes you in an embrace you can receive when you encounter God and that makes you feel protected and loved beyond all limits.*

I don't know what you felt when you listened to this new friend of ours, but I couldn't help being deeply struck by every detail of her story, because she made very clear how God acts through this grace that we call "charism"—as we read about in the School of Community. God's charity uses this way to make faith possible in a person who was distant from it, and He does so—as she said—in the most natural way: He makes the journey compelling without any forcing; she simply came across a person with whom she immediately felt a strong bond that she didn't expect because they were "strangers." Thus, what was previously completely foreign to her slowly begins to become familiar and a completely new relationship is created, up to the point that any kind of foreignness is erased. This is the way and it is totally simple. To understand this, it is not necessary to attend a course on the charism because this would be something abstract. The way is to come across a person who attracts you by the way in which he treats and looks at everything and with whom a bond is generated. In time, our friend realized that it was He, God, who was "drawing me to Himself through her. Without chains, without constraints [...], only through the love transmitted to me by that family of people who were no longer strangers." A different humanity has only one way to communicate itself, and in a relationship with that person there was something that attracted her. The attraction and not the chains. She perceived all of this as a gift from God due to the affinity that was created—as the School of Community says later on—with people with whom she felt truly united: "Children of God and therefore brothers and sisters." Perhaps we have become accustomed to stories like this because we have heard so many of them, but seeing this happen today, in the historical situation in which we live, means that it can always happen and that it is the way—totally human—in which the Mystery becomes a companion to our destiny: He attracts us in this place, which becomes, as it was for her, a companionship to destiny.

*Hello.*

Hello, how did you existentially rediscover the scope of the charism, you who have been in the life of the movement for a long time?

*A friend, during the work that our small group did on the School of Community, recounted living in this period with a continuous distraction that caused everything to be lost, with an inability to fix a point in the day that held together everything that happened: everything was slipping away without consistency. Another friend, during a meeting of our Fraternity group, recounted how, in the face of the news of a sorrowful event that had happened to his friend, he had not "moved" in the slightest compared to what he was doing the moment before, as if nothing had happened. I am grateful to these friends because they have shown that there is a place (the charism in its various forms) in which it is always possible to speak freely about oneself; in this way they made me more aware that nothingness is not a philosophical abstraction and that I too can slip into it, and then that this dwelling, the charism, is irreducible to every limit, to every slip into nothingness, because in the experience of the charism I meet the living Jesus, the only possibility for not giving in to nothingness. The book, on p. 79, says that, "The Event happens today according to a specific form of time and space that enables us to face it in a certain way and makes it more understandable, more persuasive, and more educationally effective." And this, as it says on p. 80, is decisive because charism is "the factor that makes belonging to Christ easier existentially; in other words, it is the evidence of the Event present today, inasmuch as it moves*

*us.” Reading, reflecting, and comparing my experience with this chapter, with the charism, is like being immersed in the living Mystery who speaks to me, touches me, embraces me. Going through these pages makes me grateful for the initiative God has taken toward me. My thirst and hunger for the Mystery have become greater.*

After listening to our friend who spoke before, it is striking how we who have been living this experience for a long time can find ourselves so distracted and impervious to everything, and acting without consistency; from the initial amazement that changes everything, we slip into the distraction that prevails in so many moments, so much so that one remains insensitive even to the sorrow of a friend. It seems almost unthinkable. Yet, these two contributions, one after the other, help us understand that the nature of this place that fascinated our new friend is a reality that continues to welcome us along the way (as it welcomed her), constantly lifting us up from our distraction, from our failure. It is not a place where we have to live up to things, but rather a place where everyone can share all their hardships, all the difficulties that arise along the way because it is “irreducible to every limit.” This irreducibility represents for each of us the only possibility of not giving in definitively to nothingness because it constantly lifts us up, awakens us from the torpor in which we so often find ourselves, and moves us, sets us in motion again, facilitates our belonging to Christ existentially because only the evidence of the Event present today moves us. This is crucial for us because we are human and therefore know what it means to lapse in many aspects of life, but we at the same time know that we are in an irreducible place that has the ability to always reopen the game, to not leave us at the mercy of nothingness, and to put us back in motion.

*Regarding point 9, I was very impressed when it said that “charism is like a window through which you see space in its entirety” and that “the proof of a true charism is that it opens you to everything, it doesn’t close you in”(p. 80). As soon as I read these sentences, I was amazed at how they described the experience I have been having lately. It is a very complicated time at work—there have been a lot of heated discussions, and every day “organization” is always the main topic. One morning, in yet another attempt to handle the situation, I reiterated that my position was that we should be open to what is proposed to us. A coworker of mine, with whom I recently began to work, but with whom a beautiful relationship is being born, told me, “No matter what, you continue to amaze me, because you are always available and open to everything, and you don’t pull back beforehand.” Driving home I reflected on what she had told me and I thought that it is not that I am open, but rather that my coworkers were full of complaints. Yet, I must say that this explanation didn’t satisfy me completely—something was missing. Then in the evening I read point 9, and it gave me a jolt because I realized that I was not taking into account the fact that I am like that for a specific reason; that is, due to what I encountered, the charism, which shaped me, making me better and open. It struck me that I wasn’t taking that into consideration, but I was actually reasoning as if these things were aspects of my personality (which may even be true in part). I can’t help but notice how true what I read in the School of Community is—that the charism has made me a new person. Thank you!*

Thank you, because after your words what the first two contributions said unfolds clearly before our eyes, surprising us and revealing the nature of the grace that has happened to us, and the nature of this charism, which allows us to be open to live any circumstance in reality, and also to

the difficulties that one finds at work and in our relationships and personal lives, in everyday circumstances. The first to see this are those with whom we live, in this case our coworkers: “You continue to amaze me, because you are always open.” Instead, our friend didn’t realize it, and didn’t think she was open, but only that others were complaining. But, returning home, she realized that this explanation didn’t convince her completely; something didn’t add up. And then the text of the School of Community made her understand where the openness she had witnessed to—and her colleague had noticed—came from, making her heart jump with gratitude. This is an example of how we can understand the nature of charism only through experience. Experience always precedes everything we read. Experience makes us understand the text and the text helps us to understand the experience more and more. In fact, if she hadn’t experienced what she recounted to us, she would have read the text without realizing its value. On the other hand, if she hadn’t re-read those sentences, she couldn’t have given an adequate reason for all the depth of the experience she had had, from which the “jolt” caused by her surprise at Fr. Giussani’s words originated. The texts accompany us, as was said before, so that we can become aware of the event that happened in our lives, an event we have not yet fully understood. So much so that she was unaware that the charism is making her a new person, that it has generated her: “The charism has made me a new person.” Imagine, my friend, what it would be like to wake up in the morning with this awareness, not only with your mind already full of worries, but challenging every worry with the awareness that the Mystery has generated you and is shaping you, so that you can face whatever happens during the day with the difference that He has already instilled in you—almost without you realizing it—in the folds of your being, in your gaze on reality. This is the charism: a place through which the Mystery generates us as people open to any circumstance, any challenge, any situation. How many people complain in the situations in which they find themselves? God, instead of sending us an explanation, generates us in such a way as to make us live everything with this difference: open instead of complaining. Let’s go deeper into this aspect of the charism—“a particular that renders one capable of the whole” (p. 80)—to become aware of a misunderstanding that easily slips in.

*For me, too, the point of work is that recalled at the beginning of the last contribution and that you have just reposed: the fact that Fr. Giussani says that the charism is “a particular that renders one capable of the whole,” a window that opens onto the whole horizon. This way of understanding the charism has accompanied me since I entered the seminary more than thirty years ago. In the seminary I had encountered some who took a slightly different approach. The idea was that the charism was an addition, an “ornament,” a specific emphasis, not necessarily fought against (there were those who appreciated it, those who tolerated it, and of course those who looked at it with suspicion). The perspective, in short, was this: there is the spirituality of the diocesan priest, which is, let’s say, the common ground, and then, starting from the personal charism—for me, for us, the charism of a movement—we can add something. On the contrary, Fr. Giussani’s hypothesis is profoundly different. I repeat: the charism is a historical particular that introduces and brings to life everything—it is not just an addition. The question that arose from the contrast between these two perspectives has always stayed with me, and today I seem to have understood two things. The first is that beyond the theological question, there are many reasons in favor of what Fr. Giussani said and is saying. It is important for me not to close this question*

*existentially, to always keep it in mind: How does belonging to the charism of CL open me to reality, to everyone I meet, to the reality of the whole church? I want to be open to everyone I meet, to the whole of reality, to the whole experience of the church. If I close this question, it is easy to fall into what the pope has repeatedly rebuked as being “self-referential.” The question of how this particular, which for me is the charism of Fr. Giussani, opens to the whole is a provocation that must always be kept open, not intellectually, not theologically—because at this level it seems to me sufficiently clarified—but in life, existentially. The second thing I have understood is, and I think this has also become clear over the years, that there is a path we should avoid, one that claims that you can open yourself to everything and everyone only if you belong a little less to someone, in my case if I belong a little less to CL. This seems to me a misconception that keeps coming back (said or not said, clearly expressed or not), even among us priests. If the charism is a way and a particular enabling us to live the whole, then one can understand its value only by walking its path. The more you hesitate, the less you understand where it can take you. The longer you stand still, the thicker the fog becomes. So, only by resolutely living a precise belonging do you come to know if it is good for you, if it opens you, or if it closes you up. Using a slogan, I would say that the goal is the whole through a particular, not in spite of a particular.*

“Through a particular”: this is the expression to remember because it is the method used by God—as we are seeing in this evening’s witnesses—to open us to the whole. And this is not something that is achieved once and for all, as you say; we must always live this tension and help each other to not close ourselves by taking for granted the nature of the charism—which is to open us to the whole. In fact, belonging to the experience of the charism is not in itself a guarantee that we are already living this openness to the whole. We know very well that “saying is one thing while doing is another thing altogether,” so it seems to me that leaving the issue open is very healthy, very beneficial for us. In addition, we should avoid falling in to the other trap you have highlighted; namely, thinking that to be open to everyone you need to belong a little less to CL. It struck me that the text says exactly the opposite: the more one lives a charism, the better is one’s belonging in the church. In this regard, I was struck by hearing a friend recently talk about how the experience of his daughter with a group of high school friends showed him that it is precisely by living more the particular to which they belonged that they are opened up to the whole life of the church. That is why I asked him to share it with everyone tonight.

*Unable to see each other because of the “red zones,” some high school kids, including my daughter, decided to meet at Mass (which is the only activity that is open) at a church that was centrally located to everyone’s home. The priest, who is not from the movement, noticing a significant presence of “unknown” kids, was, once he was told the reason for this, so impressed that he decided to reopen the Parish Center for them, to give them a place to study and play. After a week he sent us a letter that described beautifully the whole journey he had made from his initial amazement to the beauty of staying with the students. I am very struck by the way in which this priest was attracted by a newness during this critical time, a newness that renewed his awareness of the good for which it was worth running the risk of reopening the Parish Center (clearly respecting all the regulations and safety measures, but going against the idea that it is*

less risky to stay closed). This is a newness that made him want to be with them, that is, to make the initial wonder become an experience by staying with them, by trying to make the reality of the circumstances more adequate to their needs. The consequence is that the kids became attached to him and go there every day. It reminded me of the end of point 7 on responsibility as sympathy, on the nature of a decision that is not a strong act of will because “the decision [...] springs forth as the establishment of a sympathy. The apostles followed Jesus because they were attached to Him with a judgment that made them capable of a perfectly rational decision, because where a relationship is generated that turns into a deep sympathy, when an attachment born of an incomparable awe is renewed, rationality is an event” (p. 70). This describes exactly what happened.

Beautiful! I am impressed because I think that this is an obvious example of how those high school kids didn't have to be a little less friends with each other, a little less CL, to amaze that priest. Indeed, precisely because he was amazed at the beauty of their relationship, he opened the Parish Center to them, offering them the opportunity to follow the beauty he saw before his eyes. The simplicity of a story like this evidences how those kids were already living the charism, how it was already entering the folds of their lives, and how therefore they were able to open to the whole. We can see in them how they are better introduced to the church the more they live their relationship, so much so that the priest grew attached to them and they to the priest without having to be less friends among themselves. Thus, the sympathy of which you spoke was born. The point then is that the charism we encounter becomes more and more ours. Sometimes, it is as if we feel a sense of extraneousness in the face of the call to “responsibility” just mentioned.

*When I read the following words I couldn't avoid a sense of great disproportion: “Everyone bears responsibility for the charism he has encountered. Everyone is the cause of the decline or increase of the charism [...]. It is very serious matter for each one to become aware of this responsibility, as urgency, as loyalty and faithfulness” (p. 83). In some circumstances of this recent period, especially at work, I saw some of my limitations—related to my temperament—emerge, limitations that troubled me. Then I re-read this sentence on responsibility and (I won't deny it) I began to measure myself, changing the method away from what the text says. It is clear that Fr. Giussani is not talking about responsibility as rising up to the circumstances, as a matter of our ability or, as you often tell us, of our performance. But if it is not tied to our performance, what responsibility is Fr. Giussani talking about? What step of awareness is he asking of us in these pages about our responsibility?*

Let's see whether in reading these pages anyone began to measure themselves like you did and discovered something new.

*My question is very similar. The work of School of Community has always helped me because I need to work on what happens to me so that things gain in value and nothing is flattened and reduced to the level of the prevailing feeling of the day. I need this work in order to live without getting sidetracked. Point 9 insists on responsibility toward the charism, on the question of living for the work of Another, on the call we need to answer. I don't always live with this awareness, and in fact, I happened to read this part of the School of Community after some difficult days and thought, “How far I am from this!” Immediately afterwards I ended up measuring myself, in part because Fr. Giussani doesn't apparently give us any alternatives. In fact, on p. 82, he states,*

*“To draw back from the ‘form of teaching to which we have been entrusted’ is the first step toward tiredness, boredom, confusion, distraction, and even despair.” I cannot deny, however, that this reaction of mine has revealed something real about myself in this recent period: how moralistic I am! I often wake up in the morning and the only concern is that I “have to” do my job well, “I have to” help that student to get a passing grade, “I have to” prepare the lessons for the next day, if I can “I have to” also attend daily Mass, “I have to” prepare dinner, “I have to” read something before falling asleep, only to start again the next morning. How sad! The only position that saves us from this moralistic slide is the one you proposed to the assembly with the Taiwanese community that was published in Traces: “Just imagine how it would be if instead of waking up already worried about the things you have to do, you let yourself be suffused with the awareness of how fortunate you are. How different the whole day would be!” (Traces, no. 2/2021, p. 8). This is the reason for my belonging to the charism—it is not out of duty. How can I regain this gratitude on a daily basis instead of falling into the usual moralism? Thank you because everything you propose becomes a contribution to my journey.*

Others, like you, initially had this fear in the face of Fr. Giussani’s statement that “everyone bears responsibility for the charism he has encountered.”

*Hello.*

Hello. How did you overcome this fear?

*I will start from what happened after the contribution I gave on January 30th at the public meeting on Education: Communicating One’s Self. I wanted to tell you what I have understood thanks to that moment together and thanks to the work I found myself doing because of the School of Community, and therefore what is happening now. The first new thing was to recognize the charism of the movement as real and alive for me. In fact, the charism had always been something abstract and distant from me, something I thought was given to Fr. Giussani. I had never wondered about its historical impact. Now it happens that I, who am actually not great at anything, find myself standing in front of reality without too much fear; that is, the fear is there, but it is overcome by the hope of the good seed in my life. It happens that I recognize that the good seed is Christ who comes to me through the charism, that is to say, through my friends with a face, with a name, in a beautiful companionship. In reading and thinking about the School of Community, I began to understand the lines, “Everyone bears responsibility for the charism he has encountered” and “the charism rises or falls according to each one’s generosity,” and also “we must make it our normal behaviour to compare ourselves with the charism” (pp. 83–84). When I first read point 9, these words scared me because I perceived them as a judgment and an imposition; moreover, I applied them to other people and not to myself. That meeting on education and on everyday reality called me to be educated first personally as an individual and a wife and a parent, and as part of a group of friends within a larger companionship, rather than looking at others with prejudice. I began to stop feeling uncomfortable in saying the name of the Father who is generating me now, and I realized that investing in what lasts (that is, the soil of Jeremiah I referred to on January 30th) corresponds to the seed of hope mentioned in the letter written by some teachers and CL educators to the Corriere della Sera, which before I didn’t understand well. So for the first time in a secular public school context, I chose to risk myself and circulate among the class representatives the link to the January 30th meeting. I did it with great freedom and without fear of being judged,*

*simply because I have experienced personally that what helps me can help others, and that there can be no uneasiness in declaring what generates me so strongly. The result went far beyond my expectations: the class representatives were enthusiastic and forwarded the link to all the parents of the class. Then with a small group we decided to meet to talk about the educational issue in these times of the pandemic, especially in light of the problems in our class. Thus, I find myself facing another opportunity to be educated; reality never gives up on me. These facts are objectively changing me; they are teaching me to understand the greatness of the charism and the meaning of words of Fr. Giussani that I quoted. Concretely, I am truly overflowing with gratitude, an immeasurable gratitude for the gift I have received, totally gratuitously.*

Do you see how the charism is revealed and continues to be revealed before our eyes as the very concrete thing mentioned by this evening's first contribution? If the charism is perceived as an abstract thing (without historical impact, as you said), it is possible to feel, in reading the part about the responsibility we have toward it, an imposition. This is the opposite of the experience our new friend had. However, all our reactions and perceptions—of being extraneous, of abstraction and fear—are opportunities to be surprised through an encounter (in your case, the encounter on education and the School of Community, etc.), to see how our life is regenerated, generated again, exactly in this situation that you described. You didn't have to change, the charism simply took hold of you as you were—as it took hold of our new friend through a coworker who was a “stranger” to her. It took hold of you as you were at that time and caused your “I” to emerge: “I began to stop feeling uncomfortable in saying the name of the Father who is generating me now.” The amazing thing is that this was not just a thought, so much so that it set you free, opened you to the circumstances to the point that you risked yourself and sent to the class representatives, in a secular context, the link to the meeting on January 30th. Having done this, you were surprised that it was welcomed and forwarded to others and that it generated a group of people who began to work on the issue of education. This is what we need to look at: the experience of the charism generates all of the greatness of what is happening to us.

We can neglect this life, and thus “obscure and diminish”—until we no longer perceive it—“the intensity of the effect that the history of our charism has on the Church of God and on society” (p. 83). But the Lord, through this place, continuously reawakens us if we allow ourselves to be generated, and makes us understand in experience the greatness of the charism and the meaning of the words that describe it. What effect does this have on our lives? It made you overflow with immeasurable gratitude for the gift you had received gratuitously.

So, what does an experience like this generate?

*“We have to grow, to mature, and to act in the world according to the particular ‘form of teaching’ with which the Lord has chosen to meet us” (p. 82). Reading this passage from point 9, the first question that came to mind was what this “form of teaching” really was. In the meantime, as part of the Cultural Center, we organized a video connection with Mireille of the Edimar Center in Cameroon, the woman mentioned in an article in Traces (no. 1/2021). In cases like this it is very easy to slip into saying “beautiful, beautiful” as an end in itself, which now bores and even bothers me. So I got involved personally because I wanted to see, to understand, whether I would find what I was looking for. I asked her directly, “I want to be like you, to mature like you, I want to understand what supports you.” She replied that what supports her is*

*“the weekly School of Community I do with kids and educators.” I thought, “That’s it?” It seemed too little to me; is it enough to be faithful to the School of Community? Yet, her face, her look, and the certainty present in her words gave rise to a great enthusiasm in me. She was neither tired nor confused, much less desperate, despite what she experiences every day. So I performed a simple but convincing verification: to have such a humanity, there are no alternative forms of teaching to the only possible one, that is, to follow the steps that this story concretely proposes to me, first and foremost the School of Community. Simply following—there is nothing else to do to have in my own eyes that hundredfold that is present in Mireille’s eyes. It isn’t about thinking about following the experience and the way given to me by interpreting a path, but rather following what you tell us, Julián, being attentive and following the experience in the faces of the witnesses who renew my own witness, being attached with wide eyes to those people in whom I see the charism happen again today. Humble fidelity to all of this changes the position of the heart, of my heart, every day, first toward myself and then toward the world.*

It is in this place that you have described so well, my friend, that each of us is helped to be generated in this way, to respond to the desire you express when you see the life of someone like Mireille, who fills you with enthusiasm: “I want to be like you, I want to understand what supports you.” The meeting with her was an opportunity to understand that you just have to follow, that there is nothing else to do to have that hundredfold you saw in her. The rule is easy, Jesus always reminded us, “He who follows me shall receive a hundredfold now in this time.” Fr. Giussani repeated this line often; in fact, he said that he had almost never spoken to us without quoting those words of Jesus. You have now newly rediscovered it by seeing the hundredfold happen in a person; it struck you that what Jesus said was happening in her, and that this was the sign that she was letting herself be generated by the form of teaching to which she has been entrusted. This is the beauty of the path that Fr. Giussani proposes to us: he puts before us a person in whom we can see that what we want can be fulfilled, so that we don’t detach ourselves from the form of teaching to which we have been entrusted, and so that our lives don’t become tired, confused, or desperate. That is why we can’t conform to the “beautiful, beautiful,” but rather, we follow the attraction we see in front of us. In fact, as we studied in the previous points of *Generating Traces*, what ensures that the experience of correspondence that we have lived and that we see in someone else can continue is responsibility. Following, answering. In order for this to become ours, we need to do what you did—you identified yourself with that inflection that you saw happen in Mireille. In the attempt that each of us makes, in the approximate inflection of our attempt, Fr. Giussani insists, “Methodologically, morally and pedagogically this comparison [with the charism, just as we have received it] must therefore be our greatest concern;” the comparison with the charism “just as it emerged at the origins of our common history”; otherwise, the charism can become “a pretext and a cue for what we want; it covers up and justifies what we want” (p. 84). What does this comparison actually consist of? One of you has this question and sent a contribution. Now she will speak to us about it.

*Hello. The point we are studying reads, “Everyone, in his every action, every one of his days, in all his imaginings, in all his resolutions, in everything he does, must be concerned with comparing his criteria with the charism, just as it emerged at the origin of our common history” (p. 84). And a little later, “For now, the comparison is with the person with whom everything*

*began. This person can be dissolved, but the texts left behind and the uninterrupted succession—if God wills—of the people indicated as the reference point, [...] become the instrument for correction and for reawakening; they become the instrument for morality.” (ibid.) So, now, the comparison is with you. But I wonder: what does this mean, concretely? I don’t have you close to me in my daily life! A little later, however, the text goes on to say, “Giving one’s life for the work of another, not abstractly, is to say something that has a precise historical reference. For us it means that all that we do, our whole life, is for the increase of the charism we have been given to participate in, which has its chronology and a face that can be described; it indicates names and surnames and, at the origin, has one name and one surname” (p. 85). At this point, another question arises: in comparing myself with these “names and surnames” that are close to me, it happens that I hear or see the different “names and surnames” living different things. To which of these people should I compare myself?*

When I read your question, I immediately thought of the phrase of Fr. Giussani that I quoted at the meeting on education on January 30th: “In a society like this, you cannot create something new if not with life: there is no structure nor organization nor initiatives that can take its place. It is only a different and new life [we saw it tonight, in each contribution] that can revolutionize structures, initiatives, relationships, in short, everything” (“Movimento, ‘regola’ di libertà” [Movement, ‘rule’ of freedom], O. Grassi, ed., *CL-Litterae communionis*, no. 11/1978, p. 44). After the journey we have made we can better understand from within our own experience what this comparison consists of. From the beginning of our history, the “form of teaching to which we have been entrusted” (p. 82) has been the very life that each of us has come across, as did our friend who offered the first contribution. It wasn’t then, nor is it now, a question of a moralism, of rules to follow, or of a correct and clean discourse, but rather of a form of teaching that, as Fr. Giussani always proposed to us, had its paradigm in John and Andrew. That shows how much Fr. Giussani was convinced that nothing can be changed except through a life! This life is communicated by attraction, not by proselytism. We saw it happen again today in the witness of a new friend and in the story of the amazement of the priest who opened the Parish Center. Names and surnames challenged the lives of those they met on their way. Therefore, the comparison shouldn’t be made out of moralism or to measure one’s performance. The comparison is with a life, as we said, that we see happen in these names and surnames, as our friend did in front of Mireille: “I want to be like you, to mature like you.” The comparison begins, dearest, when you are faced with this difference in potential that doesn’t leave you indifferent—it doesn’t happen with everyone in the same way—that attracts you and in attracting you, moves you. So faith becomes interesting for living. This applies outside the CL “enclosure,” but also inside it. There is no difference. To live the faith, the method is the same: an attraction. It isn’t that attraction is needed outside CL and that a role, moralism, and rules are enough within CL. That is absurd! We wouldn’t be here tonight. Like you, I too have been called to participate in the experience of the charism through the responsibility I have been asked to take on. Therefore, in doing my work to guide the movement I find myself comparing myself like you to everyone’s life, to all those I meet, to all the beauty of the witnesses that I in turn put in front of all of you—Xiao Ping, Azurmendi, and the [CLU] kids, up to our new friend this evening—because I am the first to be continuously generated by these names and surnames. Then, when I have to face life, I can’t help but face it like you, with these facts before my eyes. I have to face the pandemic, I

have to face the question of what pulls me out of nothingness, I have to face the circumstances that result from the collapse of what at one time was evident, I have to face the problem of education in a pandemic, I have to meet people completely different from us. What do I have that is different than what you have to face all of this? I too have all these facts that constantly generate me. Because I have the same problem you have: living. I live all these challenges in front of everyone, in front of you now, with these facts before my eyes. You should verify—making the comparison is this verification—whether, in the attempts you make to face every circumstance, in what you see in others or in me, you find something that helps you to face the challenges that everyone is facing. Why did our new friend follow the coworker she had met? Because it made her feel different in front of reality. Why did we approach the pandemic in a different way? Because it made staying in reality easier for us. What do we compare ourselves to? With the circumstances in which the Lord puts us, in which He gives us witnesses to help us live. I understand your question well: “What does this mean, concretely? I don’t have you close to me in my daily life!” I remember what I often heard Fr. Giussani say: “Take note of what I say in public, in front of everyone.” When I was in Madrid, I saw him once a year and from afar, much less than you can see me, and I had nothing else to compare myself with besides that. In all the gestures we do in the movement, you have before you a way of facing the challenges and with which you can compare yourself, verifying if the way something strikes you, because of what you see happening in front of your eyes, helps you and makes it easier for you to live better. In fact, it is only because of an attractiveness—not for any other reason—that Christianity has been communicated from the very beginning and will continue to communicate itself. The origin doesn’t continue to be present because we tell each other about the past, but the other way around: since there is something that attracts us today, that gives us a jolt today, we are interested in the past. You are curious about what you see happening today, and that’s why you want to find out where it came from. That is why the comparison with the charism makes us feel the effect, the repercussion, of how one lives in the present. It is what Fr. Giussani says: “What is [...] authority? [...] Authority is the place—because you, too, are a place, right? where [...] the battle of the prophecy and its verification [are lived];... where the battle to affirm, and the verification to confirm that Christ’s proposal [...] is a response to the perception, to the needs of one’s heart [...] is clearer and simpler [where Christ is experienced as the response to the needs of one’s heart]” (in “Who Is This Man?” *Traces*, no. 9/2019, p. 10). Like you, I too must make a comparison with the charism we have all encountered.

Fr. Giussani showed us the criterion for judging, emphasizing that the criterion for judging the life of the whole church and the experience of the charism is the same. In this regard, it is worth re-reading how Fr. Giussani talks about this at the end of *Why the Church*. To the question, “Is the Church truly the prolongation of Christ in time and space? Is it the place and the sign of his presence?” he answers, “In continuing what Jesus did in his earthly life, the Church addresses our humanity as it is. [...] Like Jesus, the Church makes an appeal to that capacity of man which we called elementary experience, the essential component of the religious sense, the “complex of needs and evidences ... with which the human being reaches out to reality. [...] It is then, with this supreme critical sense,” continues Fr. Giussani, “to be sought and won over and over again, that the Church wishes to measure up, placing itself at the mercy of authentic human experience” (L. Giussani, *Why the Church?* McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2001, pp. 204–5).

By meeting a witness, we are invited to verify whether he lives better than we do. To make a comparison is to grasp a difference in potential. It is to this comparison that the church submits the proposal she makes to man: “It leaves its message to the actuation of our hearts’ original criteria. It does not require certain conditions to be mechanically respected. Rather, it entrusts itself to the judgement of our experience and, indeed, it constantly urges that experience walk its path in completeness” (ibid., pp. 205–6). On the other hand, this is “the criterion that guides us even in the least important of our choices. Men accept this or that invitation. They choose to be with this or that person because in making their choices, they hope for more satisfaction, more intense correspondence with their heart’s desire. And since freedom is the power of adhering to the object of our aspirations, man who is made for happiness, steers his free dynamism in pursuit of what Saint Augustine referred to as the ‘greater fascination.’ And this means an even greater fullness of life, even more total possession of being” (ibid. pp. 206–7).

At this point, Fr. Giussani emphasizes that “within the history of humanity, the Church proclaims that its only concern is to bring man’s supreme yearning to fulfillment without asking him to forget any of his own very real desires or his own elementary needs. Rather, it promises him a result superior to his own powers of imagination—the hundredfold. [...] The Church [...] cannot cheat in making its proposal. It cannot just hand over a book and a series of formulas to exegetes for it is life, and it must offer life, and it must enfold the experience of men deep within the embrace of its claim” (ibid, pp. 207–8). Yet, immediately afterwards, Fr. Giussani addresses our responsibility: “But neither can man attempt to make such a portentous verification without a commitment that engages his entire life. Nor can he reach the end of the journeying that will assure him of the credibility of all the Church proclaims, without first being willing to make a commitment. If the Church presents itself as life, a fully human life charged with the divine, then man must commit his life to be sure of the truth [...]—of whether the Church’s promises are true or not—unless he starts out from what the Church is today, near him. If the Church cannot cheat, then neither can man. Man’s prospect is a true journeying, but his heart must be willing” (ibid, p. 208).

When we meet a witness, we have the opportunity to see if he lives better than we do. To make the comparison is to grasp this difference in potential. It is to this comparison that the church submits her proposal to man. And just as the church cannot cheat, neither can we. The point of comparison is not a more rigid moralism, but the presence of that difference in potential that helps us face life in a truer, more real way, that makes you live better all the circumstances in which the Mystery places you. For this reason, when one discovers it, he is filled with gratitude. Are all people the same? Do we notice a difference in potential in everyone? Does everyone attract you in the same way? Do they all set you in motion in the same way? Everyone must verify this in their own experience—this is the question that Fr. Giussani left open. It always strikes me to read these passages by Fr. Giussani in *Why The Church?* because they leave the story open. Just as the church cannot cheat and must measure herself against the needs of man, so the charism must measure itself against your basic needs. This is where the comparison takes place, a comparison only you can make. Why did our new friend surrender? Because she recognized the human benefit of living like her coworker, she saw how she was more herself. We have also seen this in other contributions, and each of us was able to make the comparison with himself.

We have been continually called to this, to that comparison that even the church recognizes as a criterion for judging. We read about Paul VI addressing Fr. Giussani from this perspective at the beginning of the movement: “I don’t understand your ideas and your methods very well, but I see the fruits, and so I say, keep doing what you are doing.” And he repeated this to him in 1975: “Take heart. This is the right road” (A. Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2018, pp. 223, 515). The comparison is with that newness that the Holy Spirit gives birth to and puts before us so as to keep us from giving in to nothingness. Here is all the drama that the charism introduces into life, so that we will not succumb to our nothingness.

School of Community. The next School of Community via video connection will be held on Wednesday, March 24th, at 9:00 p.m.

This month we begin reading the third chapter of *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, entitled “A New People in History for the Human Glory of Christ.” We will work on point 1, “A new protagonist in history,” and point 2, “For the human glory of Christ.”

Exercises of the Fraternity. Next week I will send a letter to all the members of the Fraternity that will include all the instructions for registration and participation in the Exercises, which will take place via video connection. Please read it carefully, paying attention to the various details of this year’s proposal.

Holy Week Gestures. This year, the CLU will propose the gestures of Holy Week—the meditations on Thursday and Friday morning and the Way of the Cross on Friday afternoon—all via video connection. Exceptionally, given the special circumstances of this year, we invite all adults to consider the possibility of participating in the Way of the Cross and, for those who can, also in the other gestures proposed by CLU. The instructions for registering will be announced in the coming weeks,.

The booklet with the songs and readings wanted by Fr. Giussani for the Holy Week of the university students will be available on the CL website. GS will communicate its initiatives through its usual channels.

Easter Poster. Let’s watch together the video with the image and the text of this year’s poster.

*[video]*

The image we have chosen is a painting by Giovanni Francesco Romanelli, *St. John and St. Peter at Christ’s Tomb*, . The text is by Fr. Giussani.

Ultimately, people—young and not so young—need one thing: the certainty of the positivity of their time and of their lives, the certainty of their destiny.

To say “Christ is risen” is to affirm that reality is positive; it is to lovingly affirm reality. Without Christ’s Resurrection, there is only one possibility: nothingness.

Christ makes Himself present as the Risen one in every period of time, throughout the whole of history. The Spirit of Jesus, that is to say the Word made flesh, becomes an experience possible for ordinary man, in His power to redeem the whole existence of each person and human history, in the radical change that He produces in the one who encounters Him and, like John and Andrew, follows Him.

The video poster will be available shortly on the website and on the social channels of the movement. In the coming days, it will be also be available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. For the paper version of the poster contact your community secretary.

Let's use the poster, in paper or digital form, as an opportunity to meet everyone. Only by engaging ourselves personally will we be able to discover that its content truly enlightens our experience and takes us a step further in our certainty of the resurrection of Jesus, present in the flesh of our lives.

May this time of Lent find us available to grasp the signs of "His power to redeem," so that we may say yes to Him again, like the child who allows himself to be embraced without reservation. I wish you all a good Lenten season!

See you next time. Thank you and good evening.