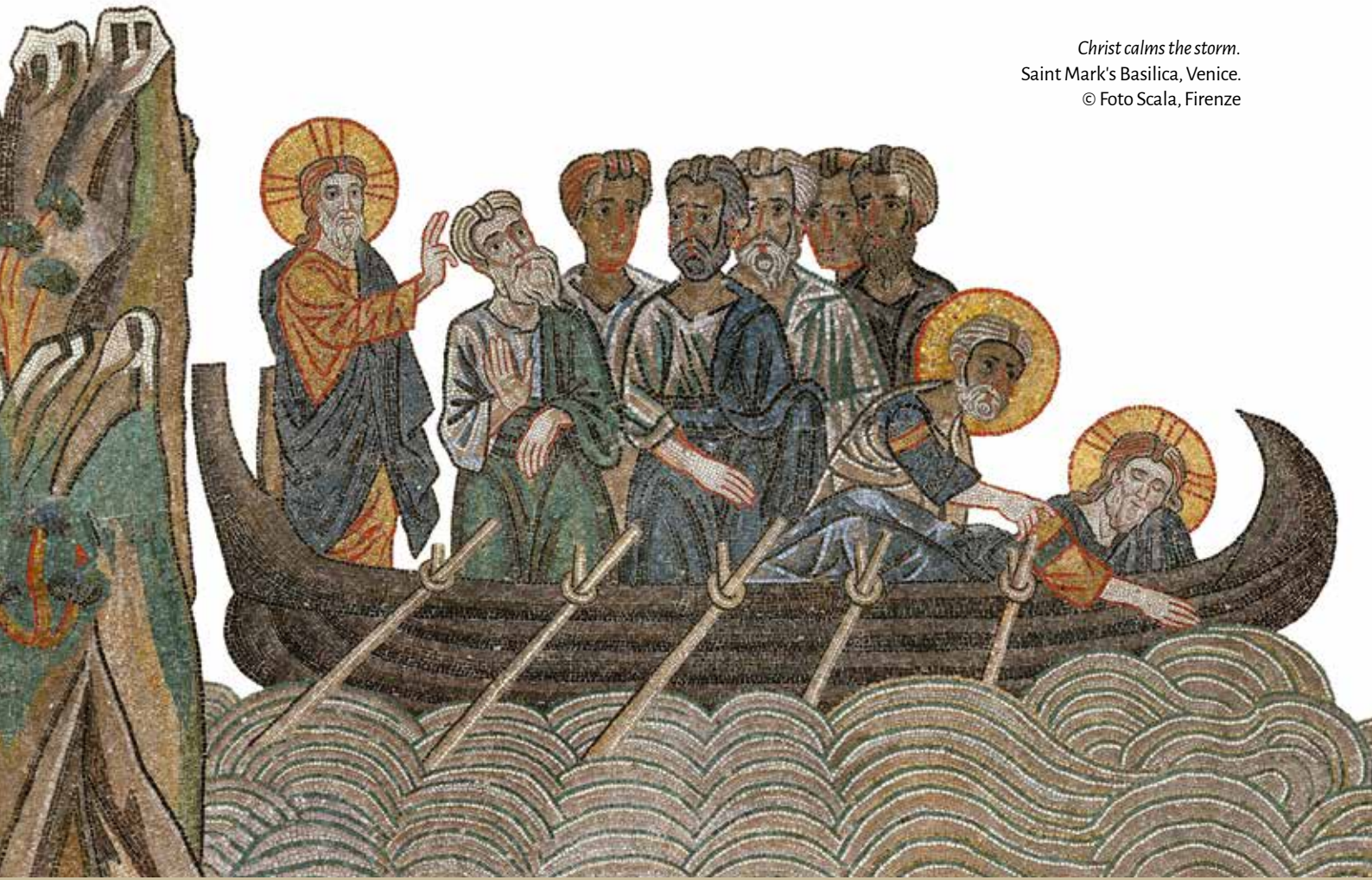


Christ calms the storm.
Saint Mark's Basilica, Venice.
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***“You Are not Lacking
in Any Spiritual Gift”***

(Saint Paul)

**Beginning Day of the Adults and University Students
of Communion and Liberation**
By video link, September 25, 2021

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Julián Carrón

Nobody could have imagined that we would have been called to bear witness to the grace of the charism in the midst of a storm. And, like the disciples in the boat, we are wonderstruck that notwithstanding all of our limitations, the fiercer the storm rages, the more the incomparable exceptionality of Christ emerges, the affection for Him that the event of the charism given to Fr. Giussani has instilled in our blood.

Aware of the potential difference between our nothingness and His grace, we ask the Holy Spirit to widen the crack in our heart so that the light of His presence will not meet obstacles in us.

Come Holy Spirit

Welcome everyone, both those here in person and those following by video link. The experience of these two years has taught us that even in this modality, nothing can prevent the happening of what our heart awaits with expectancy. What makes the difference is not primarily the instrument or means we use. Whether participating in person or following by video connection, each of us has discovered our reaction while listening to the first song. Who has personally felt “the longing for someone absent”?¹ Each of you, in the place where you are now, has felt vibrate, or not vibrate, all the longing of which the human heart is made. But paradoxically, it almost does not matter whether we perceived the longing, because at times not even this is in our hands, poor wretches that we are; the important thing for sure is that we feel at least a fleeting pain in seeing how much more the writer of this song felt that longing than we do, we who have encountered the One who responds to the heart’s expectancy. How I would like to feel all the fiber of my being vibrate the way it must have vibrated for the songwriter!

However, let’s not waste time reproving ourselves for not perceiving it, because we can make up for it right away. How? Maybe we did it as we sang the second song, asking Him who caused us to encounter the grace of the charism to make it happen again. “I’m old by now [I’m old, my heart no longer vibrates as it did when all was fresh and new] [...] / but if you want, you will save me.”²

¹ “Minha luz,” Portuguese fado, lyrics and music by J. Mariano and A. Costa.

² Claudio Chieffo, “Ballata dell’uomo vecchio” [Ballad of the old man], in *Canti* [Songs] (Milan: Società Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, 2014), 218.

1. The grace of the charism

In what we have felt and experienced up to now, in these initial moments, you see a reflection of all the drama of this historic period, the challenges we face, together with our contemporaries. We face this circumstance, this situation in history, with a great resource: the grace that has filled our lives and that notwithstanding our fragility, distraction, and betrayal, still finds space in us. Nothing has succeeded in totally ripping away from our being that grace that won us over and has brought us to this point.

But in introducing the first point of today's itinerary, I would like to say that there is nothing less obvious than our presence here today. Rather, this is the fact that most strongly strikes our attention, that most fills us with wonder and gratitude, inviting us to become even more deeply aware.

I was made more aware of this by Charles Taylor's question at the start of his contribution to the exhibit at Rimini *Living Without Fear in the Age of Uncertainty*. Ever since I heard it, I have not been able to get it out of my mind. "How did I avoid ending up like most of the inhabitants of Quebec, who after a certain period became enraged with the church? Suddenly, in the 1960s, there was a rebellion and many people left. Why didn't I follow this movement?" This question kept bubbling in me all summer, making me ever more aware that we cannot take for granted in the least the fact of our remaining in the church.

How is it that we did not end up like so many of our peers who abandoned the church? In the desert that is advancing with dizzying speed in our European, Western contexts (and not only), in the continual hemorrhaging of the numbers of those who belong to Christ and the faith, what made it possible for us to remain in the church? What is the reason for our presence here today? Why were we not swept away too? Facing Taylor's question seriously made me infinitely grateful. The more I thought it over, the more I was filled with a surge of gratitude and emotion. It made me recall what Saint Paul said to his friends in the community of Corinth: "You are not lacking in any spiritual gift."³ This experience prompted the title of this year's Beginning Day.

Nothing is clearer to me: if we are here, if we do not belong to the desert, it is because of the grace we have received, the grace of the charism the Holy Spirit gave to Fr. Giussani to serve the church; that is, because of the way Christ chose to attract us to Himself, to establish a persuasive relationship with us. This grace remains and happens again in our lives, and this is the root of the presence of each of us here today. Where would we be otherwise?

"You are not lacking in any spiritual gift." In the members of the community of Corinth, Saint Paul saw at work the grace that had filled them and that not even all their wrongdoing, all their limitations and mistakes could obscure. Saint Paul's gaze was full of the grace of His presence, which in that particular situation had used Saint Paul himself, his testimony and teaching, to reach them.

I could not help but link this thought, which came to predominate in me more and more, to Fr. Giussani's gaze. "As we go on maturing, we are a spectacle for ourselves, and, God willing, for others, too. A spectacle, in other words, of limitation and betrayal, and therefore of humiliation, and at the same time of inexhaustible certainty in the power of grace that is given us and is renewed every morning. This gives us the naive boldness that characterizes us."⁴ How much betrayal we experience and therefore how much humiliation! But nothing, nothing, can cast doubt on our inexhaustible security in the grace that is given to us and renewed every morning. This is the dominant thought that filled me with silence!

What makes us so grateful for the grace of the charism? Why did it so radically open a breach in us? Because it responded to our thirst for fullness and destiny, making us perceive faith as something pertinent to life, capable of changing

³ 1 Cor 1:7.

⁴ Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, trans. Patrick Stevenson (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 98–99.

it and fulfilling it. Only “this, in fact, demonstrates its reasonableness and therefore makes conviction and the energy of freedom inherent and possible, makes a loving attitude and generosity current, and all this produces creativity.”⁵ This urgency is highlighted in a line of Giussani’s that I have quoted many times in recent years. If we do not respond to this urgent need, faith cannot endure in the world in which we are called to live. “Because of my formation at home and in seminary, first, and my own reflections later, I was deeply convinced that, unless faith could be found and located in present experience, and confirmed by it, and useful for responding to its needs, it would not be able to endure in a world where everything, *everything*, said and says the opposite.”⁶ A faith that cannot be found in experience, that has nothing to do with life, that does not penetrate deep down, that cannot respond to its needs, that does not enhance the human, cannot seize us or attract real people, not only in our era but in every era. Things in the past may have seemed different, but only because of the cultural, social, and political weight of the church.

“Therefore,” said Giussani, “we were moved by the desire for faith to be pertinent to life, because it was reasonable, free and creative” and “we were characterized by the awareness that faith is the announcement of a present fact, an event here and now that has a physiognomy that you can perceive with your senses, a sign in which it exists, and is called the ‘Christian community.’”⁷ If Christianity were not an event of life, if Christ were not present now in a human sign, if He were not encounterable not just metaphorically but really in His mysterious body, in the holy church of God, according to its concrete and specific emergence fixed by the Holy Spirit, Christianity would be unable to respond to the needs of life, would not give rise to an experience of fullness and we would be at the mercy of everything that surrounds us.

We are here because, through a precise, historic, carnal encounter, we were reached by the grace of the charism given to Fr. Giussani. It made evident for us, in a persuasive and pedagogically mobilizing and operative way, the mystery of the Christian reality, of the Christian event, its congruence with the structural aspirations of our humanity.

“Charism is the modality with which the Holy Spirit, the energy of the Spirit causes us to glimpse the evidence, that is, the truth of faith and its capacity for transformation.”⁸ A charism evokes affinity and “this affinity is called ‘communion.’ The reality of this communion that lives is called ‘movement.’” For this reason, Giussani continued, “a movement is not a piece of the church.” Rather, “a movement is the modality with which the church is lived, the entire Christian fact is lived.”⁹ In fact, the gifts received have been made fruitful for the life of the church and the world, and above all for each of us; these are the gifts God has given for our salvation: the sacred scriptures, baptism and the other sacraments, the Eucharist, and the authority of the bishops and the pope. Therefore, as Giussani wrote, “Every charism regenerates the church everywhere, it regenerates the institution everywhere, obeying ultimately what guarantees the particular charism itself—Grace, Sacrament, Magisterium.”¹⁰

At the recent meeting of the leaders of CLU (Communion and Liberation University students), after having seen the exhibit about secularization, *Living Without Fear in the Age of Uncertainty*, one university student said, “During the silence as we were hiking up the mountain I was moved to think that if I hadn’t encountered the Movement I wouldn’t have remained Christian; if I hadn’t encountered the charism I would’ve lost interest and probably drifted away from the church, even though I’d received a Catholic education. I have a bond with the people I have encountered in the Movement because we’ve shared an experience of fascination, of fullness and satisfaction, that I want to last forever. Then I thought that only in this way is the Christian proposal one that respects and exalts my reason, my affection,

⁵ Luigi Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro* [The “I” is reborn in an encounter] (1986-1987) (Milan: Bur, 2010), 309. Our translation.

⁶ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, trans. Mariangela Sullivan (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019), xxxii.

⁷ Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro*, 310. Our translation.

⁸ Giussani, 312–13. Our translation.

⁹ Giussani, 313. Our translation.

¹⁰ Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, 81.

and above all, as noted in the exhibit, my freedom. I have been thinking in recent days that this is the only thing that holds up in the face of the challenges of life, its complications and problems. It's the only thing capable of making me lift my head when I fall; that is, of making me aware of a present attraction (like listening to you or the professors yesterday afternoon or the video at the exhibit), and the rest (the rules, what you should know or do) is of secondary importance. If I take my eyes off this, I notice that I tire, I feel suffocated, and life loses its color right away; it takes very little time. Instead, when I live with this awareness, life starts anew and becomes exciting."

So then, you understand why Fr. Giussani told university students in 1987, "For us, being in Communion and Liberation became necessary for living the church—unless the Heavenly Father sends orders to the contrary! It became necessary because it is the way you were called to perceive faith as life."¹¹

Through the grace of the charism, the attraction that won us over in the encounter, we perceived the presence of Christ as charged with meaning and promise for us, as the response to the deep needs that constitute the human heart. Never before had we experienced such a correspondence to our truest desires, such a definitive embrace of our needy humanity, which at the same time liberated our needs from the reductions inevitably made of them, by our own work and that of the environment in which we are immersed, revealing them in their original physiognomy. In the experience of correspondence that characterized the encounter, we saw the authentic face of our heart emerge; our desire was kindled, our affection for the human was deepened, our sensitivity to our own wounds and those of others was heightened. Gradually, as our attachment to the event that fascinated us deepened, we began to see the restlessness and struggle of our fellow human beings with the same gaze we experienced upon ourselves, the same tenderness we ourselves perceived in the encounter.

2. The surprise of a gaze: the impact of the charism in history

We had documentation of this at the Meeting of Rimini. For those who were able to participate in person and for those who followed it online, it was a magnificent window through which to view our times. It enabled us to continue seeing what has already emerged in the challenge of the pandemic: the generalized spread of a certain existential void that we have called nihilism and the many personal and social situations of difficulty, bewilderment, and suffering.

A friend wrote me, "In the Meeting, above all in the exhibit on TV series and the one on secularization, the cry of needy humanity emerged clearly, a cry expressed in many different forms." The same cry was perceived in other exhibits, for example, the one entitled *I, Pier Paolo Pasolini*: "Something is always missing, there's an emptiness / in all my intuitions";¹² or the one about Rose's women entitled *You Are Worthy*, with the question they all repeated, "Who am I?" I think of the cry contained in the song by Lady Gaga: "Tell me somethin', girl, / Are you happy in this modern world? / Or do you need more? / Is there somethin' else you're searchin' for?"¹³

Thus, we have seen the deepest and most uncomfortable human questions roiling up and coming out in the open. Each of us was able to verify in the repercussions we felt the attitude with which we experienced these questions. In the early 1990s, Giussani said that women and men today are characterized by "doubt about existence, fear of existing, the fragility of life, one's lack of substance, the terror of impossibility; the horror of the disproportion between oneself and the ideal."¹⁴

Many among us grasp this human cry with clarity. Another person wrote me, "This is a particular period in the world, according to what I'm seeing. It seems like I only encounter wounded people." But these wounds are first of all

¹¹ Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro*, 389. Our translation.

¹² Pier Paolo Pasolini, "VI. L'alba meridionale" [Southern dawn], from *Poesia in forma di rosa* [Poems in the form of a rose] (1961-1964), in *Bestemmia Tutte le poesie* [The blasphemy of all poems], vol. 2 (Milan: Garzanti, 1995), 801. Our translation.

¹³ Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper, "Shallow," from the album *A Star Is Born*, 2018, © Interscope Records.

¹⁴ "Corresponsabilità" [Co-responsibility], *Litterae Communionis-CL*, n.11/1991, p. 33. Our translation.

ours, as each of us can recognize if we have not turned to stone. Therefore, the more we are made conscious of our wounds by the experience we live, the more we are able to feel close to those wounds we encounter in others. And at the same time, the wounds of others make us discover with more awareness our own.

In this way of looking at our own wounds and those of others, we can discover Fr. Giussani's own gaze. "The world today has returned to the level of poverty of the Gospel; in Jesus' time the problem was how to succeed in living, not who was right and who was wrong."¹⁵

The encounter with a living reality that looked upon our humanity in a full way, kindling in us a presentiment of truth, a force of attraction and hope, was and is crucial for us. In the same way, we see the same happen in the people we meet who do not hide the cry of their humanity. The writer of the letter I just quoted, who began by saying, "It seems that I only encounter wounded people," added further on that as soon as these people "feel that wound understood and loved, they never let go." The thing that makes them so attached is the surprise at a gaze in which they feel their wounds embraced.

The same thing continues to happen to us, as you can understand by reading a woman's letter to one of the curators of the exhibit on TV series. "At the end of the exhibit *A Burning Question: Encounters and Discoveries in the World of TV Series*, I felt grateful for having visited it. I listened to the narrations of the characters in a fiction series that talks about young people and the one set in the future and I thought about my own life, my wounds, my great fragility. I realized that I wanted to watch these programs and that I desired to begin talking about them with someone. Wondering why I desired this, I thought that it's because through them I want to reach the light I saw in this exhibit. This light I saw is the most beautiful and surprising thing in the exhibit. Where and what is this light that I saw? It's a light that I saw at the end of the dark tunnel of suffering and pain experienced by the characters. We were introduced to this by the words of the exhibit curators and the guide. The curators themselves waited for us and listened to our questions and reflections. At the end of the exhibit, I wondered why the curators came up with an exhibit like this, one in which I could talk about myself. I don't know the answer, but I thought of the difficult period that introduced me to adulthood. During the last years of university, I began going frequently to a psychologist, but I kept getting worse. Thinking again of the exhibit, I wondered what the difference was between the experience I'd just had and what I experienced when I saw the psychologist. The question closest to my heart surged up: 'Why do these people want to encounter me, what I truly am?' Then other questions came. 'Why did I see the eyes of the guide and then of the exhibit curators looking into my eyes and I felt alive and loved, even knowing I had many wounds? Why after the exhibit did I want to live, exist, and be happy? Why did I realize that my wounds did not crush me as I recounted something about myself? Why did the curators have the courage to listen to my life, my wounds, my questions? Who are they? How can they be the way they are, able to listen to me and welcome me?' I saw their great-heartedness. I want to know them and follow them. Theirs is the same great-heartedness that I saw in the people of the Meeting, in the volunteers, in those who made the Meeting, the exhibits, the talks, in the friends who were there. I looked at all this and then I thought of my parents and the many parents who in the 1960s were so consumed by work and who knows what else. I thought of my desire and need as a child to talk about myself to someone who saw me and loved me, and the great pain in not being able to do so. I thought that my parents were unable then to listen to me or that I was unable to make myself understood by them because I made some mistakes. However, something new happened to me at the end of the exhibit as I was talking with the curator: I felt the desire not to condemn my parents and not to let myself be determined by my errors, but to forgive them and myself because in a certain way, the curator and this people of the Meeting that I saw were more family to me than my own

¹⁵"Corresponsabilità." p. 33. Our translation.

family. I felt that once again something was happening in me that, thanks be to God, has happened many times in my life in an encounter with Christ present through witnesses: I felt that I was not alone in the world anymore.” There could be an infinite number of stories like this, as is documented in Ilaria’s surprise when a student asked her at the end of an online lesson if he could ask her something personal: when Ilaria asked the student why he had turned to her, the student said, “Because there aren’t many people you could ask a question like this.”¹⁶ There is the story of how a mother was moved and surprised when she saw her autistic son’s apathy and fear overcome month by month by the gaze of a teacher who participates in the experience of the Movement and who, with small and consistent suggestions, involved him in relationships with his classmates to the point that he couldn’t wait to return to school. Or the meaningful story of what happened between a teacher and the “head” of the students who run an ultraprogressive school newspaper open to all forms of freedom. The student had sought out the teacher unbeknownst to the others, almost ashamed, and said to him, “All the others think in the same way and I need someone who introduces something different.” Or the amazing insistence of a group of students in inviting their teacher to spend a day in the mountains with them. She recounted that she put them off and tried to get out of it, but they would not give up; such was their insistence that in the end she yielded. During the journey to reach them, she wondered, “Why do these kids want me? Why do they want me to be there?”

What do we see vibrating in these facts? Faith vivified by the charisma, in its capacity to have an impact in history for those who perceive their own wounds, needs, and questions, who never stop seeking, implicitly or explicitly, a gaze capable embracing their needy humanity. In fact, this perception of your wounds is what “sets you on the road of the encounter”¹⁷ and enables you to realize its importance. In all these experiences, we see clearly that the most crucial question of life is to come upon *significant presences*, “people who are presences,”¹⁸ Giussani said, people who are not frightened of their own humanity and enable others to look at their own as well, without censoring anything. Here is a renewed sense of what it means to be witnesses to the faith in the “existential peripheries,” as the pope often calls us to be.

Encountering these people does not silence or quell our questions. Rather, as we have seen, it makes them explode in us all the more. “Who am I? How can they be the way they are, able to listen to me and welcome me?” The friend in the letter did not let up, continuing, “Why did the curators want to make an exhibit like this?” “I don’t know the answer,” she wrote, “because it’s theirs. I know that having seen this exhibit, I’ve encountered some friends, because I discover that I’m making the same gesture of true humanity that I see them making and that I desire for myself.” This is the origin of friendship. Friends are those who enable a gesture of true humanity toward yourself. This is how we recognize the friends we need, and this is the way we see once again the Samaritan woman’s wide-open gaze in front of Someone who took her thirst seriously.

In this sense, I was very struck by Pope Francis’s words to the bishops of Slovakia, inviting the church not to separate herself from the world, looking at life detachedly, but to immerse herself in real life, asking herself about the deep need of the people.¹⁹

The striking thing is the difference of gaze, a gaze that at once embraces and reveals the deep fabric of our hu-

¹⁶ “Perché lo chiedi a me?” [Why do you ask me?] *Tracce*, n. 8/2021, p. 30. Not included in the English issue of *Traces*.

¹⁷ Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro*, 362. Our translation.

¹⁸ Luigi Giussani and Giovanni Testori, *Il senso della nascita* [The meaning of birth] (Milan: Bur, 2013), 116. Our translation.

¹⁹ “How great is the beauty of a humble Church, a Church that does not stand aloof from the world, viewing life with a detached gaze, but *lives her life within the world*. Living within the world means being willing to share and to understand people’s problems, hopes and expectations. This will help us to escape from our self-absorption [...] Instead, we need to become immersed in the real lives of people and ask ourselves: what are their spiritual needs and expectations?” (Francis, *Address at the Meeting with Bishops, Priests, Religious, Seminarians and Catechists*, Bratislava, September 13, 2021) (Italics ours).

manity, our true need, our thirst. This friend may have encountered many people but not all of them were able to embrace her needy humanity.

This happens in the horizon of today, in the given circumstances. Precisely here and now, in the full ambiance of the breakdown of the human, the surprise of such a presence happens, the surprise of people who are presences. This is anything but taken for granted. In this way, we discover the crucial importance of Taylor's question even more. In Bratislava, the pope encouraged us to be free and creative in front of people who no longer believe and have lost the meaning of faith. How? "It is useless to complain, to hide behind a defensive Catholicism, to judge and blame the evil of the world." Instead, "let us look for ways to open a hole in the roof," perceiving the crack in everything, to use Leonard Cohen's lyrics, and find "new ways, means and languages to proclaim the Gospel."²⁰

3. The journey of self-awareness

How do you explain a place where a person can feel embraced so much that she can look at her own wounds and the "endless darkness" to the point of desiring not to condemn her parents but to forgive them and herself, and not let herself be determined by her errors? We read it earlier: this friend experienced rebirth while visiting an exhibit, but obviously this exhibit did not fall from the sky like a meteorite; it was not like a flash of lightning out of a clear sky. All those who put it together live immersed in a certain experience of faith at the root of something of the kind. The gaze expressed in the exhibit, the humanity that the curators showed and that the woman who wrote the letter perceived are not the result of a strategy or artistic creativity, but are the fruit of running up against a reality of church, vivified by a charism that fascinated the creators of the exhibit so much that it motivated them to engage in a human journey that generated a new "I" in them. This encounter is what shaped the diversity of their gaze and enabled them to draw close to the visitors to share with them the outcome of that human journey.

The more we become aware of the way Christ reaches us in the church in history, of the value of the companionship thus born, the more we follow with intelligence and affection the event we have encountered, the more we follow the grace of the charism and let ourselves be generated by it, and the more the substance of our "I" grows.

Let's listen to how one of you describes the journey. "When I was about 16 to 18, I thought I was the most wretched person in the world because of all the desires and needs surging in my heart. The encounter with the Movement enabled me to breathe freely because for the first time my restlessness and inquietude were looked at with fondness as a resource, not with condemnation. I bonded to the Movement because of its unique correspondence to my restless heart. But I must confess that after ten years of an intense and beautiful life, there were still some unresolved issues relating to my humanity and story. The old suspicion returned: I'm stranger than the others. Why do I tell you all this? Because the charism blossomed in me when, forced by the circumstances, I decided to take seriously my humanity and the things about it that I didn't understand, and at the same time I found in front of me a person who proposed the charism as a journey, as a working hypothesis. How essential this is! This person provoked me not to reduce Fr. Giussani's proposal and not to hide anything of my humanity, the soil in which the charism flowers. From that moment on, the charism made itself original in me. From that moment on, the charism became newness in me for all the children of the same objections to the faith that assailed me before. From that moment

²⁰ "We are heirs to a rich Christian tradition, yet for many people today, that tradition is a relic from the past; it no longer speaks to them or affects the way they live their lives. Faced with the loss of the sense of God and of the joy of faith, it is useless to complain, to hide behind a defensive Catholicism, to judge and blame the evil world. No! What we need is the creativity of the Gospel. Let us be attentive. The Gospel is no longer closed; it is open. It is still alive, it is still active, it is still unfolding. Let us think of those people who brought a paralytic to Jesus, but could not get through the front door. They made an opening in the roof and lowered him down from above (cf. Mk 2:1-5). They were creative! Faced with a difficulty they asked 'How can we manage this?... Ah, let's do this...'. Perhaps, faced with a generation that no longer believes, a generation that has lost its sense of faith or that has reduced the faith to mere routine or to more or less acceptable religiosity, let us look for ways to open a hole in the roof; let us be creative. Liberty and creativity... What a fine thing it is when we find new ways, means and languages to proclaim the Gospel!" (Francis, *Address at the Meeting with Bishops, Priests, Religious, Seminarians and Catechists*).

on, I became an educator. Educating the CLU students was a precious opportunity to live the responsibility of the charism encountered. From the beginning I understood that I had to live in front of them, as Fr. Giussani said, not to insist on them, but to live in front of them.²¹ I got involved in their life starting from my life and my needy humanity. In this sense, I realize how crucial it is to live my needy humanity from the start of the morning, being aware of the true nature of my need. In this way the charism is made alive in me as I gradually verify its relevance to my need. At the same time, I'm surprised by the humanity of the students and their questions, which are never taken for granted. I'm the first to be amazed by their amazement in front of the correspondence with us of the event of Christ present. In front of them I'm not an expert in the charism or a leader. I've experienced firsthand how important it is for my own good to encourage them to verify things personally, not giving them answers, but challenging them to a personal journey. How many wondrous things I would've missed if I'd spared them a certain drama, the journey of a personal discovery! So, in these years I've witnessed with surprise the generation of the 'I' of some of the students through an encounter between their humanity and the charism of Fr. Giussani, an 'I' that makes the charism new and at the same time has begun to generate other people (I think of the young people they've met in high schools as teachers), who, in turn, are now renewing the CLU. I can assure you that nobody can take these young people for a ride because the charism has become part of their experience." When someone starts to say "I," this person is surprised to see the "I" of others blossom.

What is the outcome of the journey that begins with an encounter with the reality of the Movement? The fruit is an intensity of Christian self-awareness that can then express itself in a gaze, in an exhibit, in work or relationships, because "the power of a subject lies in the intensity of that person's self-awareness."²² For this reason, when you run up against a person with this clarity and intensity of self-awareness, you can't help but be shaken.

How can each of us attain this self-awareness and make it our own, as our friend who visited the exhibit desires? Who can answer this question better than Fr. Giussani himself? Let's listen to what he said at the 1976 Spiritual Exercises of the CLU to university students and thus to people who might have been there for the first time. It seems tailor-made for us today, so pertinent is it to the moment we are going through. I'm proposing it to you because since I listened to it some months ago, I have not been able to resist returning to it to listen again. All I wanted was for it to become my own. I think I could not have given you a more beautiful gift at the beginning of this year, during which we will celebrate the centenary of the birth of Fr. Giussani. Let's listen to some passages from that talk.

²¹ "You have to be in front of him, not insist on him." Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro*, 366. Our translation.

²² Luigi Giussani, *Il senso di Dio e l'uomo moderno* [The meaning of God and modern man] (Milan: Bur, 2010), 132. Our translation.

From a talk by Luigi Giussani at the Spiritual Exercises for university students of Communion and Liberation (Riva del Garda, December 5, 1976)

Transcript of the audio recording played during the Beginning Day on September 25, 2021, conserved in the Archive of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation.

Edited by Julián Carrón

Luigi Giussani

This is the tie that binds us to the truth of things at their root! That what is at stake is not above all or directly a well-running society, the possibility of a more human coexistence, a collaboration to create change and make things right, or a liberation from the oppression of power and lies full of violence. That is not it. If that were the direct problem, we could invent a political party. In any case, our movement has another immediate, direct aim: to put ourselves, our person, into play...

I'm sorry, there is nothing more humanly ground-breaking and true than this. Nothing more humanly obvious, but [also] more ground-breaking, than these words from Christ, "What profit," what profit is there if you achieve all that you think up, "if you gain the whole world"—he says—"and then lose the meaning of yourself?" You lose your soul. "Or what can one give in exchange for himself?"²³ The affirmation of an ideology? A dialectical position in society, a rage expressed with fists and Molotov cocktails, physical violence, the accumulation of hours and days of comfort, or that curiosity of knowledge that, if it is intelligent, cannot help but become anger or agony because of the increasingly evident disproportion between the medium and the object, of one's own mind and the enigma of reality? "What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world if he loses himself? Or what can one give in exchange for himself?"

This is the word that comes first—we used it for the first time four years ago, making it one of our "usual" terms from then on: self-awareness. It is not a poetic term: it is precise. Awareness of oneself, the sense of the irreducibility of oneself. "What can one give in exchange?"

The sense of the irreducibility of oneself! Because there is nothing [else]... what is there, what is there that is more evident than when we speak the word "I" with a minimum of attentive tenderness? What is more evident than the fact that, saying "I" this way, a person affirms, senses he affirms, perceives he affirms an irreducible reality? No one and nothing else could name itself using that word in all of history, yesterday, today or tomorrow, throughout eternity...

Look: the newness we see in life is proportionate to the maturity of this awareness of oneself, this sense of oneself, of this gaze upon and enthusiasm for oneself. Please: do we understand that the subject, by which we mean that from which all things flow, spring forth, which gives them substance and a face, from which all relationships flow, meaning every action and every movement, is this "I?" I!

There is a law, a law you should write down, a law of this self-awareness, of the life of this self-awareness, of this "I," of this person I am. And this "I" is priceless. As Pascal said, "What is a person? An invisible point within the enormity of space." But if all of space, the whole world came crashing down on me, upon this ephemeral point, within the apparent stability of all of space; if it were to come crashing down on me to crush me, "I am greater than it because

²³ Cf. Mt 16:26–27.

I understand what is happening.”²⁴ I understand, there is something in me that escapes from the grips of this immense disaster and defines it, grasps it from the outside, understands it. There is nothing that would suffice to buy my person...

But I told you there is a law. Let me formulate it: you recognize and love your own identity in loving an other, in recognizing and loving an “other,” between quotes. It is in recognizing and loving an other that the capacity for affection springs forth...

We love, we recognize and love an other, a man recognizes and loves a woman really only as a projection of the energy of recognition and love for himself. Because, the Gospel says it, too: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”²⁵ The generative criterion to love an other is the love I have for myself.

We—think how many times we’ve said this—we do not love others because we do not love ourselves...

You are incapable of loving someone, of being a friend, if you have not recognized that you have been loved, or that you are loved by your father and your mother. Those who study psychology know this very well. It is psychologically documentable. The clear perception of being wanted, of being desired, of having been wanted and loved, of being loved..., this is fundamental for our mental health. Everyone knows it, but no one thinks of the structure of the law found within that fact...

If we do not discover everything, mother and father, and woman and man, with an admiration and exaltation, in the contemplation that begins here, precisely from this discovery, [if] we do not discover that they are signs of the original structure of our being, of What makes us exist—exist!—because in this moment, what I am is not something I give myself... To be wanted, to exist means that I am continually wanted—wanted —, therefore I am loved or, to use the metaphor from the School of Community, I am called out of nothingness in every moment. The substance of my “I” is the fact that You want me, oh God...

A person loves his own identity by loving an Other... There may be no one who really sees him, but if he understands all this, he is a free man, a stable man, perhaps with a pained outlook on reality, but the suffering is wholesome, just like the resurrection, like glory—as the Bible would say—because glory and resurrection—life—comes through the cross, through suffering...

“I have”—the poet D’Annunzio said—“what I have given.”²⁶ There is nothing more illusory and therefore a more inflated lie than this. “My substance is what I have given”: this is a definition that does not fit humanity, any creature. “I am” only “what I have given”: the exaltation, therefore, of our substance as our being reactive, our substance as violence, as reactivity and violence.

I have what I have been given! That is the correct phrasing. I have, I am, I consist of, I have what I have been given. Self-awareness is the recognition of this, and from it springs forth an affection for yourself, for your life, for others and the lives of others; from it springs forth what is human, humanity...

The more I am aware, and, consequently, the more I am a personality, the more I go about looking at things, speaking with men and women with inside of me the transparent awareness of being made, of this presence that constitutes me, of this You—with a capital “Y”—that constitutes me, and prayer becomes the typical dimension of my life... This is the abyss that age has dug deep in my soul—but, it was something already being dug out in high school, because I have perceived these things since high school —... This is the force behind our freedom and this is the force of our creativity, and it is the force behind our love, behind our affection! Get it? This is humanity, at its genesis: the origin, the womb from which humanity emerges...

²⁴ Cf. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, n. 231, in *Opere complete* (Milan: Bompiani, 2020), 2393.

²⁵ Cf. Mt 22:34–40.

²⁶ Motto engraved at the entrance of the “Vittoriale degli Italiani,” Gardone Riviera (BS), where the poet and novelist Gabriele D’Annunzio is buried.

This profound unknown, this Enigma with a capital “E,” this ineffable God, who cannot be expressed, this You without eyes, nose or mouth, this living Mystery, who gives substance to my “I,” has become a man who said, “Father”; who said, “Mom”; who said, “Woman, do not weep”; who said, “Do you also want to leave?” who said, “Hypocrites!” who said, “Come to me all you who do not understand, who are confused and tired”; who said, “I pray you, Father, to give the strength that they may all be one”; “I no longer...” who said, “I no longer call you servants, but friends”; who said, “You have but one master: it is I. You are all brothers. You are right to call me ‘teacher.’ I am indeed”; who said, “Let whoever is without sin throw the first stone,” who said, “If I have done anything, if I have said anything wrong, explain it to me. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” who said, “Father, why have you forsaken me?” and who cried out, “It is finished,” because he had already spoken that “great” word, the great word man can say; the word of Abraham: “Father, not mine, but your will be done.”²⁷ The nature of being is in You. My substance is not the grasping attempt of my human imagination, it is not the limited scope of my thirst for life; it is rather the true source of my life, of me, which is You. It is my glory, which is You.

This self-awareness, then, is awareness of His presence. Awareness of His presence among us! If the ultimate, deepest content of self-awareness is our perception, the reverent, contemplative and astonished discovery of an Other who constitutes me from my very depths, this Other has become a person—one!—among us. He became one we could call, “You,” with a face, eyes, a nose and a mouth! A person whose hand you could grasp, on who you could rest, upon whose shoulder you could rest, recline your head...

So, if the ultimate content of self-awareness is this reality who makes me—God—, [and] the measure of a person’s being is religiosity, this foundation, this You with a capital “Y,” this Enigma with a capital “E,” has become one of us. “No one has seen God, the Son has revealed Him to us.”²⁸ “Whoever sees me sees the Father.”²⁹ One of us! “Do all this in memory of me.”³⁰ Memory: the recognition of this Presence, my self-awareness right now, my self-awareness as a person called to this encounter, as a Christian...

“We also do not understand anything about what you are saying, but if we leave you, to whom shall we go? Because you alone have words that give life.”³¹ What was that new life two thousand years ago (we said that self-consciousness is, it represents the newness of life, a person perceives this new life the more he is aware of himself)? To be in His presence! Two thousand years ago, new life was to be in His presence. [What] a feeling of freedom, of the solidity of one’s “I!” “This man speaks with authority,” which gives me solidity! It was staying in His presence. So much so that the Scribes and Pharisees, and all the masses that went out of curiosity, or self-interest, or to see miracles but then left, did not have this new life except in that brief instant when they were there with eyes wide open to hear him speak or see him perform miracles.

Two thousand years ago, new life was staying in His presence. It happened, staying in His presence, like a bubbling up, a renewal of oneself: you were born, an “I” was born! An “I” was born in its transparent, crystalline strength, with its vital force, with its thirst and capacity to love, with its humanity; in short, the humanity inside you was born. *John 3*, Christ told Nicodemus, “You must be born again... Truly, I say to you: you must be born again.” If you want to understand reality, if you want to enter into reality, you must be born again. This was how you were born again. In short, guys, self-awareness is faith... Faith is recognizing His presence... This is faith. And this is self-awareness, the awareness of myself. The more I resurrect in every hour, throughout my day, the awareness of this Presence, who makes everything... the more I return to the awareness of Your presence, O Christ, the more powerful my iden-

²⁷ Cf. Mt 26:42; Lk 22:42.

²⁸ Cf. Jn 1:18.

²⁹ Cf. Jn 12:45.

³⁰ Cf. Lk 22:19.

³¹ Cf. Jn 6:68.

tity will be, the deeper my tenderness toward myself and Your mercy toward me will be, and the more powerful my creativity in relationship with others will be! Go and reread *Colossians*, first chapter, verses 1-23, when it speaks of the “knowledge of God.”

My friends, the first question for our movement..., the first question is not how to organize the community, but to carry on the announcement... It's not friendship between you and me, if it doesn't remind you of this, first of all and more than anything else...

Let's capture the exact moment and phenomenon in which self-awareness comes into play, when the human subject comes into play, when our personality starts moving. The very first instant, the first type of phenomenon in an absolute sense..., the initiative, THE initiative, is the desire to remember. When we wake up in the morning, guys, when we wake up in the morning, what do we desire? We have to struggle—it's true—to pierce through the whole multitude of desires that instinctively present themselves to our brains, our consciousness, our soul, we have to resist this and penetrate the multitude to get to the bottom of it all, to this desire to remember Him! Because that is our morning prayer...

If everything does not reach this final shore, upon which, fragile and naked as a poor wretch, the miserable being you are, that I am, stands waiting for the thing that will save him, fulfill him, complete him, for what satisfies his hunger and thirst, that makes him master of himself and of the world—because that is what we are born for, in imitation of the One who is the substance of our lives—if everything does not reach this final shore, then everything becomes useless...

Value, then, is in making every instant, in all its content, a function of this inexorable, historical Presence, of this eternal made history. I am not stripping you of all your affections, your interests and your human pleasures; I am leading you back, I am trying to direct you back to that root of everything in which affections, interests and pleasures blossom in an unthinkable glory and become permanent, become true...

The maturation of this initiative, the capacity for this initiative matures as a history... Let us never suspend, let us never suspend this initiative, not even because of betrayal, or that most despicable betrayal that is forgetfulness, or the distraction that is habitual for us, the disappointment of when we realize what we have failed to do. The disappointment of realizing what we have failed to do is a chain to break loose from. Let's not let ourselves be overtaken by this disappointment! Do you know why we failed? Do you know why we made mistakes? Do you know why we were distracted? Do you know why we were despicably, despicably forgetful? Do you know why we betrayed a hundred times, a thousand times yesterday? Do you know why? God permitted it so that today, now, you can use this disaster as a tool to remember Him... How many times? A million times? A million times a million times. Always... We learn this path by walking! Maturity comes by doing. But how can you walk, if you do not know the way? Therefore, the norm, the fundamental rule for this history, for this journey is just this: following, to follow. To follow! To follow those who already know the path, however they walk it. Because a teacher shows you the way, with confidence, with persuasiveness, by demonstration.

Your project to grow in maturity cannot come from you... The important thing in life is recognizing a master, a teacher! Because you do not choose a teacher: you recognize him! Choosing your own teacher means following the violence of your own thoughts and torturous reasoning, as you can read in the *Second Letter to Timothy*, chapter four, verses 3 and 5.

This is called authority, we all agree, it's called authority, but for the love of God, destroy the blasphemous concept of authority as you think of it! Because it is really a corpse, mummified. The concept of authority you have is a fossil. It comes from a schematic that makes me furious, I mean, outraged, when I come across it. Because authority is not at all identifying with the person, but rather identifying with the person as a set of values, with the person's values. Because that person may be stingier than you, they may be more possessive than you, they may be small-minded, but if you

have recognized a teacher, it is because of the values expressed in his inflection! Because of the values. What are these values? Everything that helps you understand and trains you to live the instant proportional to its destiny. Every instant according to its content, your relationship with your girlfriend or with your father and mother, or your teachers as school, your political group or with your community that weighs on you because it doesn't do just what you'd like. I am fragile, my friends,—and I'm almost done—I am fragile, because I live by this following alone. What I am is because of the experience of following I live. A following that passes through the signs of people, of men and women, those signs who are the people God had me meet; but, over time, though always in following these people, becomes more and more clearly and directly Christ who is the only master: "You have but one Master!"³²

I am fragile because I live by this following, by following certain people, a community or a guided movement, who live this following of Christ. Following Christ is the only reason behind anything. Following Christ is the only thing we should pursue. I no longer have my own substance; I no longer have self-constructed certainties, in a kind of hubris or violent overinflated sense of myself.

Because of this, life becomes a journey of light and certainty and affection that I do not create with my thoughts, that I do not create by the force of my will, but that I find inside me. A certainty and a tenderness, a certainty and an affection that I find inside me; following.

Carrón

This is what has seized our innermost being, that has saved us from leaving like so many others: an impetus of life, a way of conceiving and living and proposing Christianity that has enthused us, such that faith is shown in its reasonableness and persuasiveness, on the road to personal change. The charism is the way Christ chose to establish a significant relationship with us, to attract us, to enable us to experience existentially our belonging to Him in the church of God, not in another world but in this one, just as it is, with all its challenges and tensions, "in the age of uncertainty," sailing in the tossing waves of our time. "A charism is precisely the mode of time, of space, of character, of temperament, and the psychological, affective, intellectual way with which the Lord becomes event for me, and for others in this same way."³³

Through this particular gift we are effectively rendered "capable of the whole. The charism exists as a function of the creation of a complete people; in other words, all-embracing and catholic."³⁴

So, to return to Taylor's question once again, instead of being overcome by the power of a current flowing in the opposite direction, we found ourselves "seized," attracted, grasped by the presence of Christ, who came to us through this modality, this face, this "form of teaching to which we have been entrusted,"³⁵ which for us is the charism given to Fr. Giussani, just as for others it is other charisms in the church. "The awareness of His presence," faith, has blossomed in us, in many adults and—something that is always less taken for granted—in many young people, and we have begun experiencing the newness of life that is "living with His presence," a fullness of life we never would have dreamed of. How true it is that "it is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction,"³⁶ as the Pope says repeatedly! What a grace! In fact, that Christ attracted and continues to attract us today through the face, the accent, the persuasive modality of the charism was not and is not an initiative of ours, but an initiative of the Holy Spirit: it is grace. The gift of the charism is grace, and its continual presence is grace, a grace that questions each of us, that implicates, invites, and requests the responsibility of each of us.

³² Cf. Mt 23:10.

³³ Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, 79.

³⁴ Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, 80.

³⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, "Dall'intervento di presentazione del Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica" [From the speech at the presentation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church], in *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 20, 1993, p. 5. Quoted in Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, 79.

³⁶ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 14.

We have just heard the words of Fr. Giussani:

“The important thing in life is recognizing a master, a teacher! Because you do not choose a teacher: you recognize him!” But how do you recognize him or her? How do you recognize this person in this moment in which the church is calling us to change our leadership, according to the criteria indicated by the decree of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life to all the movements and lay groups, and after the consequent necessary adjustments to the Statute? We have often repeated that “authority comes from what you live, from the experience you live.”³⁷ Speaking to a group of priest leaders of some CL communities in 1980, Fr. Giussani said, “God leads me to learn about the things I desire from people who live them, from the people who are already living them.” This is always the method. “Life is learned by following someone who lives. Not because that person is better than you! They could be a thousand times worse than you! But as a method, as an approach toward life, as conduct ... as a practical approach, they are an example. One follows an example, not a discourse.”³⁸

Giussani said on another occasion that a master, an authority, is “the place where the nexus between the needs of the heart and the answer given by Christ is the clearest, simplest, and most peaceful”; “authority is a being, not a source of discourse. Discourse is also part of the substance of being, but only as a reflection. So then, authority is a person in whom you see that what Christ says corresponds to your heart. By this the people is guided.”³⁹ So then, what is above all necessary for recognizing this master? The awareness of the nature of our true need, a clear self-awareness, as I wrote in the recent letter to the Fraternity. “What use is there in gaining the whole world if you then lose yourself?” There is no other criterion. Because a master, an authority, is the place where I most clearly see shining what my humanity needs for living: the grace of the charisma, the attraction that won us over in an encounter and changed us to the core of our being, enabling us to experience existentially the presence of Christ and His capacity to transform every fiber of our being, to fulfill us.

We heard earlier: “Maturity comes by doing. But how can you walk, if you do not know the way? Therefore, the norm, the fundamental rule for this history, for this journey is just this: following, to follow. To follow!” By following “the people God had me meet,” the people that the Spirit of the Lord raises before us to make the road toward Him real and walkable, that is by following “a guided movement, who live this following of Christ,” we follow Christ, because “following Christ is the only reason behind anything.”

Only by following we shall be able to “propose to man, our brother, a fact of life.” In fact, “the Lord came to bring us a life, not an organization.”⁴⁰ As Fr. Giussani said in a line I have repeated often, “In a society like this one, you cannot create something new unless you do so with your life: no structure or organization or initiative will hold up. Only a different and new life can revolutionize structures, initiatives, relationships, in sum, everything.”⁴¹

This is what we want to communicate to everyone celebrating the centenary of his birth: the power of Christ, life of our life, who has reached and continues to reach us and attract us, to draw us to Himself through the unique accent of the charisma, which makes all the dimensions of the life of the church persuasive for the world today.

For this reason, we can say that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift in facing the new stage of our journey.

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³⁷ Luigi Giussani, *Una presenza che cambia* [A presence that changes] (Milan: Bur, 2004), 364. Our translation.

³⁸ Alberto Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, trans. Mariangela Sullivan and Christopher Bacich (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), 572–73.

³⁹ “Da una conversazione di Luigi Giussani con un gruppo di *Memores Domini*” [From a conversation of Luigi Giussani with a group of *Memores Domini* members] (Milan, September 29, 1991) in “Chi è costui?” [Who is that man?], insert in *Tracce*, n. 9/2019, p. 10. This article was not translated for the English issue of *Tracce*. Our translation.

⁴⁰ Luigi Giussani, *Il rischio educativo: Come creazione di personalità e di storia* [The risk of education: As creation of personality and history] (Turin: SEI, 1995), 61, 65.

⁴¹ “Movimento, ‘regola’ di libertà” [Movement, ‘rule’ of freedom], edited by O. Grassi, *Litterae communionis-CL*, n. 11/1978, p. 44. Our translation.