

Luigi Giussani

**To Give One's Life
for the Work of Another**

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YOU OR ABOUT FRIENDSHIP
(1997)*

The words of Jean-Baptiste Massillon, “Dieu seul est grand, mes frères [God alone is great, my brothers],” spoken firmly and confidently without preamble, echoed in the great hall of the Rimini Fiera and set the tone for the year’s Spiritual Exercises. Fr Giussani used them to introduce his reflection to the thousands of participants, before diving into the expansive theme of the Other in You or about Friendship. He was coming out of turbulent months that had weakened him, placing him in a human state that was unusual for him, burdened by illness and the effects of time. “Old age has erupted in me,” he confided to a group of friends,¹ and his physical limitations regularly gave him pause to reflect on things that are passing, fading, ending. Instead of withdrawing or resigning himself, however, he reacted with a step toward renewal, going past appearances and committing his energies and his own intelligence to the search for a truth already known, but still to be discovered in its inner depths. It was a pensive time, full of intuitions, reflections, and critical analyses, to which he always tried to give a form and completeness, in that development of a discourse that had, perfectly, as one of its cornerstones his meditations for the Fraternity.

He went so far as to call the two lessons he gave for the Exercises that year, which explored man’s self-awareness in relationship with the Great Presence, a kind of “real divine illumination,” as the following pages can attest.

To a deepening of the content of the experience of faith, Giussani added a study of the modern and contemporary intellectual context and the mentality that flows from it, with which today’s men and women must grapple, showing the deep connections between the two. Studying the history of humankind with the intention of demonstrating that life is ultimately positive was the invitation that Fr Giussani would later extend to his friends in the Fraternity in his final address at the Exercises in 2004. It was a task that he had taken on, and his incisive pages on modern rationalism, nihilism, and conceptions of I and human freedom offer the proof and testament of this.

For every speech and contribution, Fr Giussani prepared himself scrupulously. He wrote out notes, traced an outline, and documented sources by writing out quotes on index cards or sheets of paper. Then, he spoke, and in speaking created his discourse, almost on the spot, with a desire to communicate that captivated his listeners. Beginning with the 1997 Exercises, however, things changed. The fear that his physical limitations, including changes in his diction, could make it difficult to understand what he said led him to turn to a form of communication that was new to him, made available by technology. He preached the two principal meditations to a small group a few days before the larger gathering. They were recorded, and then were projected on large screens in the meeting rooms where the participants in the Exercises gathered together. The format did not change the substance, and the live experience was not diminished. Fr Giussani was present during the days in Rimini and watched the meditations in a small room backstage. On Sunday morning, he participated in the assembly, responding to questions spontaneously.

This new mode of communication turned out to be providential from that time on. In the months and years that followed, the use of video recordings and live remote connections allowed Fr Giussani to intervene in many gatherings of the movement and to closely follow the life of the movement, making up for the fact he could not be physically present. His “intrusions,” as he called them, touched many souls and were the milestones of a journey that he passionately continued to travel along with his friends, even those “whom I do not know well, or whom I do not know at all, but with whom I feel a deep sense of togetherness.”

*Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Rimini, 16–18 May 1997.

¹ Cf. A. Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 965.

Introduction

“Dieu seul est grand, mes frères”: God alone is great, my brothers. This is how the famous preacher Jean-Baptiste Massillon began the funeral speech for the Sun King.

The death of King Louis XIV of France was a signal of the epoch in which reason claimed to occupy the whole area of God’s intervention in man, in every sense. Therefore, the Church, the ultimate source of light on man’s experience, drew back its forces at the pastoral level in order to defend the people’s morality – taking for granted that the dogmatic content was self-evident for a believer. Thus, the faith of God’s people tended to lack defence and nourishment. It is through cultural work that a people’s life consolidates and bears historical fruits, either for or against the Christian tradition that built up Western civilization.

It is as if we today were overwhelmed by the extreme consequences of the rationalistic rebellion against the living God who revealed Himself to man. “The living God.”: Jesus calls Him this, because He is the God who has revealed Himself to man, the God who exists in history.

This is why we have to ask our Father who is in heaven to deepen the awareness of our faith: “who are You, Lord, for me, for us, for the whole world of men?” This is a step in which we hope in His help to conquer the dryness of our heart, so favoured by the common mentality.

I propose to attempt this by enlarging on what is taking up my thoughts these days, in two themes.

The first is this question: what is God for man? St Paul said, “God is all in all.” (1 Cor 15:28). Who among us lives a continually revived awareness of this “God is all in all”? What does it mean?

And the second theme, how can we know Him as this? Jesus said: “No one knows who the Son is except the Father,” (Lk 10:22). So I understand why in the Letter to the Colossians, ch.3, v.11, St Paul again repeats, “Christ is all and in all.”

“GOD IS ALL IN ALL”

1. A New Beginning: Ontology

The theme of this first thought is St Paul’s motto: “God is all in all.”² Milosz in *Miguel Mañara* has the protagonist say, “Only He is.”³

“For here we have no lasting city”⁴ says the Letter to the Hebrews. This existence in me, or in human society, as it appears, with this ephemeral appearance that is yet full of presumption, in the unfolding of life produced by man in his dramatic social life, in the forms of his social being, is not a permanent existence, it is passing, it is ephemeral.

“When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place. What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them?”⁵ says the Psalm. Yet we are that level of nature where nature lives in the awareness of itself, that vertiginous level in which reality, as it appears in its cosmic totality, has a paradoxical locus that contains it all in its potency, a point beyond our grasp, yet in which everything is mirrored: the I.

St Paul’s sentence recalls a similar formula in the book of Sirach, “Now will I recall God’s works; what I have seen, I will describe. At God’s word were his works brought into being [...]. Perennial is his almighty wisdom; he is from all eternity one and the same, with nothing added, nothing taken away [...]. How beautiful are all his works! Even to the spark and the fleeting vision! [...] More than this we need not add; let the last word be, he is all in all!”⁶

Before this Lord the human I is thirsty for Him. The human I is thirsty for this God, that is, as Jesus says, “is thirsty for eternal life.” Without this thirst everything would be opaque, obscure, an indigestible nothingness: the more one is a man, the more the I is aware and impulsively loving, the more everything would be stifling and intolerable without infinity. The I is thirsting for eternity, the I is relationship with infinity, that is, with a reality beyond every limit in which reality is known. He alone is: God, all in all.

“God is all.” He is all precisely because of this thirst for infinity that defines the human phenomenon. That is, God is Being. Now, what does it mean that God is Being? Because He is all in all. He is everything. If God is Being because He is all in all, all that is, is made by God.

2. Two Temptations: Nihilism and Pantheism

But if God is all, what am I? What are you? What is the person I love? What is the fatherland? What is money? What are mountains and seas, flowers, and stars? What are the earth and the firmament?

The answer is not the solution of ethical concerns: it is the discovery of an ontology: the ontology of reality. But reality in its being, reality as it appears to our experience, that is, as it appears to man’s reason, how is it there, and of what is it made? Reality as it appears to man is made by God, it is made “of” God. Being creates out of nothingness, that is, shares Himself. It is the perception that reality is contingent on the fact that reality is not self-made.

From the vertiginous perception of the ephemeral appearance of things, there develops, as a giving-in and as deceptive negation, the temptation of thinking that things are, or may be, illusion and nothingness. If God is all, then it means that the things you have, the people you live with, are either nothingness (nihilism), or are indistinct parts – as you also are an indistinct part – of Being, parts of God (pantheism). So, either pantheism or nihilism. These positions are today the ultimate

² Cf. 1 Cor 15:28 (Bible at the Vatican: www.vatican.va).

³ Cf. O.V. Milosz, *Miguel Mañara* (New York: Human Adventure Books, 2016), 89.

⁴ Heb 13:14 (Vatican.va).

⁵ Ps 8:4–5 (Vatican.va).

⁶ Sir 42:15.21–23; 43:28 (Vatican.va).

answer to which everybody gives in, and which embraces us all when we lack a solid and clear standpoint.

Nihilism is the inevitable consequence, first of all, of an anthropocentric presumption, according to which man is capable, or would be capable, of saving himself. This is so false that all those who live defending this position, in the end, even openly, feel dissolved in a dualism whose bitterness they attempt to chase away in imagination, in imaginations borrowed from the Eastern world or from other kinds of movement, but in any case spiritualistic ones, of the Western world which always realize, at the end, a pantheistic ideal (as, for instance, the New Age from the United States).

An ideal that can be found even in Thomas Mann, in his *The Buddenbrooks*, when he describes the last man capable of defending the enormous, erudite wealth of the Buddenbrook family: a dramatic story that in him becomes tragic. In his day overburdened with work, in order to maintain the inheritance received from his father and grandfather, he can afford only ten or fifteen minutes of rest. “Lying in his armchair he rests” – Thomas Mann says – “thinking all the time of that ultimate instant when the drop that he is will be once again absorbed by the great sea,” disappearing, as a drop, as individuality, plunging into the pacifying universal standardization.⁷

These two theories and attitudes (nihilism and pantheism) dictate all of today’s behaviour; they are the only explanations of the common general mentality (also practical, or rather, above all practical); a general mentality which penetrates and weighs down everybody’s head and heart, and therefore ours, too, Christian hearts, even many theologians’ hearts. Both these theories, with all their consequences, play the same game, they have a common ground: the trust in power, and the longing for power however conceived, in any of its versions.

However conceived, in any version, power tends to be dictatorial; it is asserted as the only source, the only form of ephemeral, but possible order. The minimum of order, any need for order in a given social situation can have only power as its sure source. This, after all, was Luther’s conception, which, in the end, leads to the absolute state: since all men are bad, it is better that there be only one who leads, or few people who lead. We could say that Lenin, Hitler, and Mussolini are identical from this point of view; but these, through a Calvinist Puritan mediation, are also identical with the democratic states, American or otherwise, and, apart from the form, they are identical with Yeltsin’s Russia, or, perhaps we could say, with the present Italian government. In this culture, the state cannot be realized except as a cultural totalitarianism, unless it is attacked in its heart by something more Christian than the ideas and the practices on which it bases the whole of its wisdom.

How does one move from nihilism and pantheism to power as a target? If you ultimately reduce yourself to nothing, to a lie, to a pretence, if you feel you are a pretence, an appearance of being; if your I is born totally as a part of the great becoming, as appearance of being, as the mere outcome of its physical and biological forebears, you don’t have an original consistency; the only criterion you can have is that of adapting yourself to what comes, just as it comes, to the mechanic impact of circumstances, and the more power you have in them, the more your consistency – which is appearance – increases, seems to increase, and therefore the illusion or rather, deception increases.

3. The Existence of the I

Both pantheism and nihilism destroy what is inexorably greatest in man, they destroy man as a person, that of whom Pascal says, the smallest thought is worth more than the whole of the universe, for it belongs to an infinitely greater reality. In fact, this is precisely Pascal’s thought:

All bodies, the firmament, the stars, the earth, and its kingdoms are not equal to the lowest mind; for mind knows all these and itself; and these bodies nothing. All bodies together, and all minds together, and all their products, are not

⁷ Cf. Th. Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, trans. Helen Tracy Lowe-Porter (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2020), Part 10, Chapter 5.

equal to the least feeling of charity. This is of an order infinitely more exalted. From all bodies together, we cannot obtain one little thought; this is impossible, and of another order. From all bodies and minds, we cannot produce a feeling of true charity; this is impossible, and of another and supernatural order.⁸

The I is that level of reality in which what is real vibrates as a quest for relationship with infinity. It is called soul in traditional language, or spirit, a need for a totalizing relationship that transcends the precariousness of every possible relationship. Nihilism and pantheism destroy this I that defines the dignity of man, degrading it to the animal aspect, and the law of every gesture and every action is reduced to instinctivity: “My ravenous enemies are like lions eager for prey, like young lions lurking in ambush.”⁹

Power, too, as a more dignified demonstration of the greater capacity man has above all other creatures, is exercised as possession, obtained through an instinct more cunning than that of the lion and the tiger, but identical in its dynamism: pride, violence, and sex (or “Usury, Lust, and Power,”¹⁰ as Eliot said in the “*Choruses from ‘The Rock’*”).

So, to consider the answer to the question we have put: (“If God is all, what am I?”), how can the problem of man’s being be solved? This is not only a philosophical problem, it is above all a problem of self-awareness, that is, a problem of the I, the person: what is at stake is what you are. This problem is at stake in every human gesture, in every experience when reality reveals itself to reason. But if you burn the content of experience by saying that you are nothing, or that you are an indistinct part of total being, then there is nothing outside you, you are the sole owner of yourself. Yet, if you are not the one with power, if you are not the boss, you are the slave of the power of others, whoever holds it: so, the child can be the slave of his father and mother, the woman of the man, the citizen of the state, or the region, the province or the municipal council; the more you belong to a small narrow society, the more you depend on those who hold the power in it.

Let us recall the question: “If He is all, what am I?” That is, if Being is God, what does it mean that I am? What does it mean that you are? The evident difficulty of this question leads to the immediate result that nihilism and pantheism appear to be the answer to reason as such, to reason not sufficiently informed. Nihilism, pantheism, and, ultimately, power. Any relationship becomes power, violence, and even the most tender relationship hides a hard wire inside. Except in children, perhaps; but, in adults, everybody.

To begin to look for the right answer, let us see what God says to Moses in the Bible. “You will tell them this: ‘This is my name, I am, as the One who is, I am.’”¹¹ “Only He is,” (Milosz, in *Miguel Mañara*, had got it right) and this identifies God as Mystery. But, alongside this, even I myself “am,” and this remains the only true mystery for reason; without this mystery reason does not reason, for reason is awareness of reality according to the totality of its factors. So nihilism and pantheism are a reduction, a negation of reason, a reductive simplification, contradictory to reason and they give in to the quantitative image of things: the quantitative image of being that comes to us from daily experience, from mortal life.

The only true mystery is therefore this: how is it that I am? Of what do I consist? Of what the thing before me consists? Of what do stones and the sea consist? This question identifies the ontological – not ethical – level of the question. On the contrary, nihilist and pantheist rationalism has exasperated precisely the ethical incidence of the question, reducing everything to the affirmation of man, and the affirmation of man is a *hybris*, it is a violence towards oneself, and the mystery of the world. The Church, too, attacked by rationalism, stressed ethics to the people and in her theology, taking ontology for granted and almost obliterating its originating force.

Having said all this, we cannot reasonably ignore the fact that for reason the Mystery must be – so to speak – reduced as much as possible. So how far can reason go; and therefore, where is the Mystery unassailable? Where is reason compelled to acknowledge the existence of an ultimate

⁸ B. Pascal, “Thought 793,” in *Thoughts Letters and Minor Works*, trans. W.F. Trotter (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1910), 275–276.

⁹ Cf. Ps 17:10–12 (Vatican.va).

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, “Choruses from ‘The Rock,’” in *Collected Poems 1909–1962*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), VI.

¹¹ Cf. Ex 3:14 (Vatican.va).

reality that it cannot penetrate? What in man can be conceived in some real way – though paradoxically – withdrawn from dependence on the God who creates it? Where does his being withdraw itself from being inevitably participant in Being (rather than a part of it)? Where can the I conceive itself independent from the Being from which he derives? Where? In freedom! All the rest can be challenged by reason, it is understandable by reason. Because the fact that my hair does not make itself is evident to reason, that a flower does not make itself is evident to reason, that I don't make myself is evident to reason. But how does the Mystery who makes the flower operate, how does He make me?

More radically, how does the Mystery create something that is not identified with Itself? This too is truly a mystery!

Everything, then, can be understood, except for one thing that is still left out, and, according to reason, is still outside God: freedom. Freedom is the only thing that appears to reason as being outside God. Nothing can be added or taken away from Being as such. Freedom, however, seems to take something away from the mystery of Being, from God.

What is freedom? Let's start from experience as we usually do. Freedom is the satisfaction of a desire. The phenomenon that makes me say, "I am free" is a satisfaction. The phenomenon that defines freedom is, therefore, the total satisfaction of me, the answer to my thirst. Freedom is the need for a total satisfaction. This is why it is adherence to Being. If Being, God is everything, freedom is to acknowledge that God is all. The Mystery wanted to be recognized by our freedom, It wanted to generate Its own recognition.

But in God Himself the acknowledgment is given by the Son, by Him who was spoken to us as Word. For Jesus Christ God is Father, and for the Father Jesus Christ is Son, therefore participant in the Word, as the theology of the Most Blessed Trinity says. Thus in His person, in His behaviour towards God, the Mystery is revealed as Trinity. To accept love creates reciprocity, generates reciprocity. This, in the Mystery, is nature. The nature of Being revealed itself in Jesus of Nazareth as love in friendship, that is as love acknowledged. Thus the mirror of the Father is the Son, the infinite Word, and in the infinite mysterious perfection of this acknowledgment – in which the infinite mysterious beauty of the origin of Being, of the Father (*Splendor Patris*) vibrates for us – the mysterious creative power of the Holy Spirit proceeds.

Now, the I, the human I made in the image and likeness of God, originally reflects the Mystery of the one and triune Being, proper to the dynamism of freedom, whose law will therefore be love, and the dynamism in which this love is lived can be nothing else but friendship.

There remains yet a point that is a mystery for my reason: why has God desired the participated being, in such a way that the participated being may not confine, may not tie Being within its boundary, may not rob anything from Being?

This is the heart of the Mystery: how the participated being does not rob anything from Being.

4. Asking for Being

So, as freedom, the nature of the participated being expresses itself – let us say that noble word immediately – as prayer.

If freedom is acknowledgment of Being as Mystery, the relationship between the participated being and God is only prayer. All the rest is done by God.

It is in prayer that the Mystery still persists, lasts as the ultimate explanation, it is in prayer and entreaty, for prayer is entreaty, entreaty to be. God wants there to be someone who asks to be, someone who says so sincerely that God is all, that he asks Him for what God has already given him, namely, to participate in Being.

If the created being is the participated being, freedom posits prayer as the only manifestation of the participated being: all that the participated being does is, in itself, prayer, that is, entreaty. Also in what he understands and perceives, the rational I worships the Mystery, finds himself before the Mystery. Not in front of but within the Mystery. If freedom is prayer and asking, it is within the

Mystery.

Entreaty for what, then? Entreaty to be, to ask for Being, to ask for the Mystery. The nature of the participated being expresses itself as prayer, whose expression existentially is precisely entreaty, asking for Being. But what can it ask for? That being may become whole in him, in all that he does in existence, that is, in the amount of being that is communicated to him, of which he is constituted, in all that he does (for the being of the I is realized in action: “whether you eat or drink, whether you sleep or are awake, whether you live or die”¹²), to acknowledge that God is all, that all is made by God. *Omnis creatura Dei bona*: everything is good.¹³ All is God. God is all.

From the positive point of view, God is all, and freedom is to acknowledge that God is all; from the passive point of view so to say, on the side of nothingness, all is God. This is Christian morality. Christian morality coincides with this acknowledgment that really comes full circle where the Mystery becomes more of a mystery, unassailable even by man’s imaginings, man’s fantasy.

5. The Choice of Extraneousness

Sin is the contrary of truth and right, truth and good.

In every relationship, in any action, at any level of relationship, whichever relationship we live, sin is not acknowledging that God is all, as aim and method. In every relationship, sin is not living everything as an affirmation of God. Sin is not acknowledging God as origin, from whom the purpose and method of every action derive. “Only He is.” So nothing is ours.

If this becomes an objection, it is due to a poison added by the father of lies: and the objection is self-idolatry.

As a matter of fact, in the Bible sin has an ultimate synonym: idolatry. The “father of all lies” (as Jesus will call the devil), works to spread the rational possibility of idolatry.

We can only say: sin is any action in which being able to say, “God is all” becomes an objection; any aspect that is not consistent with “God is all.”

Thus man either tries to shy away, to hide before the presence of Being (as the first two at the beginning, Adam and Eve, did), or, in the end, gives himself up to despair: “They shall cry out to the mountains, ‘Cover us!’ and to the hills, ‘Fall upon us!’”¹⁴ on the last day.

Instead of God’s familiarity that walks with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening, we have the choice of extraneousness. Adam and Eve, rather than walking with God in the cool of the day, followed a stranger, something extraneous to their very experience. Extraneous: generated by the father of lies, Satan, whose only definition is “being against”; his freedom lived out as “being against.” Not proving that God is not all, but being against the evidence that God is all. This is his nature, like the nature of every sin. Against the evidence, against what experience shows, Satan, like temptation, shows Being as a source of deception and of evil, and therefore as a deceptive vision. This is how the father of lies proves his falsity. Therefore, he emerges in human experience as something that is against the truth and good of man: as a “stranger,” for Adam and Eve did not know it was the devil: under the appearance of a serpent he was a stranger, a stranger to their own experience.

When man rebels, he adheres to a reality that is extraneous to his being, adheres to “the world,” as Jesus says, that is, the sum of power, which has an everyday shape (like the serpent to Adam and Eve, that of an animal), but inside it is not what it says it is, inside it is not what it shows itself to be, inside “it is not.” Even Satan is a being participated by God, and therefore of God; not accepting this, not acknowledging this, is what makes Satan, and therefore the sinner, unhappy.

This explains, on the one hand, why whoever walks within this morality, a morality conceived as the acknowledgment that God is all, is glad; we find gladness, or anyway peace, even in the saddest

¹² Cf. 1 Cor 10:31; 1 Thess 5:10 (Vatican.va).

¹³ 1 Tim 4:4 (Vatican.va).

¹⁴ Hos 10:8 (Vatican.va).

situations. On the other hand, whoever follows, whoever gives in to the father of lies, the devil, who does not acknowledge that God is all (though he is made of Him), whoever gives in to a stranger is the victim, the slave and the victim, of a principle that hates him, that does not love him, which is the world: he becomes the slave of the world. And the more successful his career, the more this slavery becomes patent. St Ambrose said, “See how many masters have those who do not want to have the only Lord.”¹⁵

¹⁵ “*Quam multos dominos habet qui unum refugerit,*” in St Ambrose, *Epistulae extra collectionem traditae*, 14, 96.

“CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL”

1. Nature and Destiny of the Person

“Christ is all and in all.”¹⁶ This sentence of St Paul’s is worthy of the citation that Maximus the Confessor makes in his *Mystagogia*: “Christ,” he says “is [...] all in all of us. He who embraces everything in Himself according to the unique, infinite, and most wise power of his bounty, as a centre into which all lines converge, so that the creatures of the one God may not remain strangers and enemies to each other, but have a common locus where they can manifest their friendship and their peace.”¹⁷ It sums up the roots of all that we think and feel in our clear conviction of faith.

First of all, St Paul’s sentence. If “God is all in all,” what does it mean that “Christ is all and in all”? Theology often tries to equate these two statements by replacing “all” with “everybody” in the first one. But the first Letter to the Corinthians 15:28 says: “When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will (also) be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all [ina é ò theòs pànta en pàsìn].”¹⁸ The Greek *en pàsìn* can be either masculine or neutral. Yet in this case, in the context of St Paul’s formulation, they can only be translated in the neutral: “Everything will have been subjected to Him, [...] He subjected everything to Him” so that “God be all (*pànta*) in all (*en pàsìn*).” God all in all is not only a possible, but the necessary version, given the ultimate and more comprehensive context of the formulation.

In the Letter to the Colossians 3:11, there is the other formulation: “There is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all [*allà tà pànta kai en pàsìn Christos*].” Here *en pàsìn* is masculine plural, the context gives it both motive and stress, and therefore the correct translation is: “All and in all [in everyone].” The difference between the two has an essential meaning.

First of all, “Christ is all and in all” is, in its ontological value, the link between the mystery of the person of Christ and the nature and destiny of the person of each man: this is the real, ontological value of “Christ is all and in all.” This is why Jesus says at the Last Supper in his last speech before his death, turning to the Father, “You have given me power over every human being [literally: “over all flesh”] so that I may give eternal life to all those You have given me.”¹⁹

But, secondly, “Christ all in everyone” means that, not only ontologically, but also for man’s self-awareness, Christ is the original source, the ultimate and adequate example that makes it possible for man to conceive and live his relationship with God (the Creator) and his relationship with the other man (a creature), and his relationship with the cosmos, with history and society.

2. The Imitation of Christ

Why is the relationship with God a relationship with Jesus? Because Jesus is the unveiling, the revealing of God as Mystery, of the Trinity as Mystery. Thus “morality” is for man the imitation of Jesus Christ’s behaviour, the behaviour of the man Jesus, of Jesus ManGod, a man in whom God is.

He is for everybody the Master (“*Magister adest.*” [The Master is here.],²⁰ “Don’t call yourselves masters. Only one is your Master.”²¹), the Master to be discovered, listened to, and followed. “Blessed are those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice in their lives.”²² The imitation of Christ is knowledge of the truth, the practice of the truth for everybody.

¹⁶ Col 3:11 (Vatican.va).

¹⁷ St Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, I.

¹⁸ 1 Cor 15:28 (Vatican.va).

¹⁹ Cf. Jn 17:2 (Vatican.va).

²⁰ Cf. Jn 11:28 (Vatican.va).

²¹ Cf. Mt 23:8.10 (Vatican.va).

²² Cf. Lk 11:28 (Vatican.va).

Jesus Christ goes on in history, in all times, within the Mystery of the Church, His Body, made up of all those the Father has given into His hands, as He Himself says, and whom He, by the power of His Spirit, has identified with Himself as members of His Body through baptism. The magisterium of Christ is, and therefore coincides with, that of the Church, for by her it is authentically read and heard.

At this point allow me an observation. What we said before about power applies in a vertiginous way to authority as it might be lived in the Church. If it is not fatherly, and therefore motherly, it can become a source of supreme misunderstanding, the most subtle and destructive tool in the hands of falsehood, of Satan, the father of lies.²³ Whereas in the end, in an unsettling way, the authority of the Church paradoxically must always be obeyed.

From the institutional point of view, it is to be obeyed because what it says is the instrument and the carrier of tradition, in as much, that is, as it is formally orthodox in faith and obedient in practice to the authority of the Pope. So, from the institutional point of view, the authority is the contingent form that the presence of the risen Jesus makes use of as the operative expression of his friendship with man, with me, with you, with each one of us. This is the most striking aspect of the mystery of the Church, which most affects man's self-respect, man's very reason.

The meaning of the imitation of Christ, of imitating Christ, then, is authentically indicated by the Church's moral teaching for all men, but initially and first of all for the baptized, the faithful. The Church is therefore the source with which the whole of morality is to be compared, the defining of life's morality as awareness of man's duty and his tending to carry it out, in the light of Christ's own awareness, the only Master of mankind (*Unus est enim Magister vester*).²⁴ In baptism – the fundamental gesture by which in the life of the Church a man is made immanent in the Mystery of Christ – the “new creature” is born.²⁵ This is the new ontology, the new being, the new unimaginable participation in Being, in Being as Mystery; it is from here that the new morality derives.

But how is it possible to imitate Christ, the man Jesus of Nazareth, in the infinite diversity of the mysterious identity of each man who believes in Him? What a mysterious identity lives in each man who believes in Him!

Jesus is the man whom the Spirit of God – as for any man – caused to be born of a woman, to live and to die as the son of a mother, whose I, whose personality was invested and identified with the very nature of the Mystery, so that what it is possible to know of the Mystery was revealed immediately by Him.

Thus, we came to know that the man Jesus is made immanent in the Word of God, Son of the Father. Hence, the imitation of Christ is possible if man acknowledges himself as “the adoptive son” of God as Father, as mysteriously participant in God's nature, chosen by Jesus, Man-God, to be part of Him in the baptismal mystery, made a member of His Body.

For all these reasons the Church makes use of the definition “adoptive son,” aroused by the Spirit of Jesus to call “adoptive” our sonship. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ So, you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”²⁶ This is why the Apocalypse at the end says: “The victor [he who will follow Christ on the Cross, on that Cross that lifts Him up to His resurrection and to His Lordship over the whole world], will inherit these gifts, and I shall be his God, and he will be my son.”²⁷ Here he is speaking of man, the man who is called and faithful to his call.²⁸

But if morality for man is to imitate Christ, let us ask ourselves: how does Christ behave towards

²³ Cf. Jn 8:44 (Vatican.va).

²⁴ Mt 23:8 (Vatican.va).

²⁵ Cf. Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17; Ef 4:23; Col 3:9–10; Ja 1:18; 1 Pt 1:23 (Vatican.va).

²⁶ Gal 4:4–7; cf. Rm 8:14–17.19–23; Gal 3:26 (Vatican.va).

²⁷ Rev 21:7 (Vatican.va).

²⁸ Cf. Ef 1:5; Eb 2:10; 12:5–8 (Vatican.va).

the Father, how does Christ behave towards man as neighbour, towards the other created by the Father, towards society and therefore history, the whole history of mankind?

3. God is Father

First of all, the behaviour of Jesus, of the Man-God towards God is marked by the acknowledgment that God, the Mystery, is paternity. In Jesus' awareness there lives the totality of the Father's intrusiveness, the intrusiveness of the "God who is all in all."

Amen, amen, I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also. For the Father loves his Son and shows him everything that he himself does, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you may be amazed.²⁹

Jesus introduces man to the acknowledgment of this paternity, of this supreme familiarity with the Mystery that constitutes him, that makes all things. "In praying," Jesus says "do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This is how you are to pray: Our Father who art in heaven... [that is, in the depth, in the generative root of things.]"³⁰

Jesus said of Himself, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."³¹

The only Lord, the Mystery that makes all things and all time in which things exist, and subsist, becomes familiar to us through Jesus (the man chosen by Him and made part, immediately participant in His divine nature, in the nature of the Mystery itself). In this man we see the defining of what humanly speaking it would be a presumption to define (it could be the expression of an utmost desire, of the original longing of our awareness, but how uncertain, how rare and uncertain, and full of mistaken motives are the erratic ways of man's thought!): God is Father, the Mystery is fatherly. What is more familiar than this radical positivity, this good of which as human experience the father is the source?

4. Jesus' Behaviour towards the Father

How, then, does Jesus behave towards the Father? If He reveals to us first of all that God is Father, the Mystery is Father, how does his behaviour unfold?

a) Of this Father, of this Mystery as Father, Jesus stresses the creative power: this is the behaviour towards a father who is the Creator. Of a human existence which is a journey towards a perfection, of a human life which is weakness, fragility, inconsistency, and vertigo; of all of this, even of all of this, even of His creature who is in these conditions, He is the Redeemer, He redeems.

Christ addresses the Father as Creator.

He is the first man with an adequate and perfect awareness that all his content as man is the presence of the Father. Meditating on some chapters of St John's Gospel (like chapters 5, 6, 7, 8) we can trace a dominant thought in Christ's words: He does what the Father wants, He sees the Father, He does nothing but what He sees the Father is doing. When He watched the sparrow fall, when He observed the lilies in the field, the harvest, a man's hair, what gave Him the certainty of

²⁹ Jn 5:19–20; cf. Lk 2:49 (Vatican.va).

³⁰ Mt 6:7–10 (Vatican.va).

³¹ Jn 14:6–9 (Vatican.va).

drawing hints from everything to reach the meaning of the world, the meaning of his own life? What made this certainty flourish was His relationship with the Father, the Father's company.³²

For us to imitate Jesus, therefore, is to live first of all religiosity in every gesture. This first aspect, this first article of morality is clear to us: to live religiosity in every gesture. St Paul says it several times: "Whether we are awake or asleep we may live together with him."³³ "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God,"³⁴ or for Christ's glory, because God communicates to us in Jesus' word and in His person.

This is why the dynamic law of existence for Christ is obedience (to live everything for the reasons of Another); for us, this finds its utmost expression in offering. Offering is the acknowledgment that, like God, Christ is the *substantia* of the whole of life, that is, He is the consistency and the meaning, the value of the relationship between man and any reality in life. The value of the relationship between man and any reality in life is Christ; whatever relationship is involved. The meaning is Christ; therefore, obedience, offering is to live for the reasons which are directed to the word Christ, as Christ lives for the reasons of the Father. Hence the religiosity of every gesture, every action, every relationship.

b) Secondly, Jesus' behaviour towards God the Father as supreme perfection, and therefore life as continual tension towards Him: "Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."³⁵ The meaning of man's existence is a journey of perfection. The aim of existence is that the creature may live life as much as possible as a tension towards the perfection of the Mystery.

Morality is lived thus, not as definition of a measure or of laws, but as the tension to an imitation of Christ and its consequences. "Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law."³⁶ "Don't think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets, I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill,"³⁷ that is, in this tension, to make it possible. "Everyone who has this hope based on Him makes himself pure, as He is pure."³⁸ Making morality possible as a continuous tending to imitate Christ in His obedience to the Father.

In what sense, then, did Christ "not come to abolish, but to accomplish," that is, to make it possible? The tension is like the ultimate and permanent expression of freedom before the "God who is all in all." That this tension becomes consistency in man is grace. So, the thread of morality is a sincere entreaty for this grace. Sincere entreaty is the fundamental form of prayer: it is begging. Like in the prayer of the tax collector:

Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity – greedy, dishonest, adulterous – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.' But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even dare to raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.' I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.³⁹

Whoever says: "I can"; "I have the power"; "I have the strength," will find it proved that he can get the strength, not from himself but only through Another to whom he asks that he can have all that.

In morality, then, what has to prevail is entreaty and begging rather than the fulfilment of a resolution: it would be a presumption, not a resolution, if it weren't entreaty. What a great truth this parable in the Gospel re-proposes to us!

³² Cf. L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* (Milan: Bur, 2007), 59, 79.

³³ 1 Thess 5:10 (Vatican.va).

³⁴ 1 Cor 10:31 (Vatican.va).

³⁵ Mt 5:48; cf. Lc 6:36 (Vatican.va).

³⁶ Mt 5:18 (Vatican.va).

³⁷ Mt 5:17 (Vatican.va).

³⁸ 1 Jn 3:3 (Vatican.va).

³⁹ Lk 18:10–14 (Vatican.va).

c) Lastly, let us see Jesus' behaviour towards God the Father as Redeemer, and therefore as *mercy*.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life."⁴⁰ So the meaning of this Son, of this Word made flesh, identified with a man born of woman, is to reveal completely the love of the Mystery, the love the Mystery has for His creature: to reveal fully the love of God the Father.

Christ, this man born in Bethlehem, who lived in Nazareth, in that precise and fleeting moment of history, is our destiny-made presence and companionship, He is the Mystery of God made into presence and lasting companionship, for the whole time of His creature. "I am with you always, until the end of the age,"⁴¹ the supreme affirmation of the Creator as love.

In Jesus God's relationship with His creature is revealed as love, and therefore as mercy.

What does the word mercy add to the word love or forgiveness? To the word love nothing can be added, but to our perception of the meaning of this word, the word mercy adds something: it adds the factor of the Mystery, so that all our measures and imaginations fail. Mercy is the attitude of the Mystery, it shows the attitude of the Mystery before any human weakness, mistake, or forgetfulness: God loves man whatever crime he commits.

The acceptance of this mercy, the acknowledgment of this mercy is the high point of morality, the summit of morality; this acceptance is the depth of the authenticity of the acknowledgment that man has, that man's freedom realizes of the Mystery as the source of everything, of the "God is all in all."

We cannot beg of God the Father except as a surrender to His mercy.

5. From Friendship to Morality

In brief, Christ's behaviour towards God the Father is the acknowledgment or acceptance of the Mystery as mercy. Therefore, the relationship between Jesus and the Father constitutes the supreme actualization of friendship.

Jesus as a man acknowledges and accepts to be, Himself, His Father's mercy. Thus He accepts to die: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."⁴²

Just as obedience to the Father represents the source and the summit of virtue for the man Jesus, so for man morality is born as a prevalent, irresistible liking for a person who is present: Jesus. In spite of everything – attractiveness, sorrow, and crime – the attachment to Jesus prevails. Man's morality is born, then, as friendship with God as Mystery and, therefore, with Jesus, through whom and in whom the Mystery unveils, reveals and communicates Himself.

Through friendship is every relationship in which the other's need is shared in its ultimate meaning, that is in that destiny for which and to which every need awakens and expresses man's thirst and hunger. For men to accept this love – that is expressed in the will of God, in the will of the Mystery who, by becoming a man, accepts death, his death for all His sons – this is the beginning of morality, that is born as friendship with God. As for Jesus morality comes from accepting to be the very subject of the mercy of the Father – He accepts this Mystery that is communicated to Him, He accepts it by dying for men – thus for man, for every man, morality is born as friendship with Him, with God in Him, in Jesus.

Morality is born as friendship with God as Mystery and therefore with Jesus. Man's relationship with God as Mystery and therefore with Jesus starts and accomplishes all its greatness, its simplicity, its truth, its security, in St Peter's "Yes" to Jesus who asked him, "Simon, do you love me?"

Through Peter's "Yes" morality is the surprise of a Presence to which we adhere in such a way that the whole of life tends to be conceived through it, in its details and in its globality, so that it may please the face of that Presence. Therefore, morality for a Christian is loving adherence.

⁴⁰ Jn 3:16 (Vatican.va).

⁴¹ Mt 28:20 (Vatican.va).

⁴² Lk 23:34 (Vatican.va).

6. Light, Strength, and Help

Let us now look in detail at how Jesus behaves towards the other, towards man as neighbour.

Synthetically, it means sharing man's life as a source of light, strength, and help. A sharing in man's life as a source of light, strength, clarity, truth, energy, and help.

a) As a source of *light*: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."⁴³ Or, as He was to say at the Last Supper, "I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, because the words you gave to me I have given to them."⁴⁴

So, for us, for the man He chooses, the values through which to judge are those that pay attention to the word of the Word as presence of Jesus: as Presence now. But this is the community of the Church to which we belong, the face of this Presence, or that in which the face of this presence becomes perceivable, becomes sign, a sign, though, that contains that of which it is a sign. The community of the Church is the locus where the event of Christ's presence is renewed, is new, is born.

The method the Mystery has used to give Himself, to reveal Himself to His creature is the sacramental method: a *sign* that contains the Mystery of which it is the sign. The community of the Church is the aspect of this sign, is the visible aspect of that face. It is the clothing of that Presence, as the clothes of Jesus for the little children who stayed close to Him. The very small children, four to five years old, who surrounded Jesus and grabbed hold of His legs, sticking their noses into his clothes, and didn't see his face, they didn't remember his face, perhaps didn't even look at it. But they were there with Him. So that the clothes, the seamless tunic in which Jesus was clad, were fixed in their eyes more than His face. Similarly, Jesus makes Himself perceivable to us in the ecclesial community, as if it were the clothing with which our smallness enters into relationship with His real presence.

Listening to the voice of the authority, that is of the Pope and of the official acts of the Church, is like the antidote to drinking in the slogans of the mass media.

"Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect."⁴⁵ It was Josef Zvěřina,⁴⁶ a great man of the Czechoslovakia of some decades ago, persecuted for his faith, who, in his "Letter to the Christians of the West,"⁴⁷ quoted to us this passage from St Paul's Letter to the Romans.

The judgment that decides over the act and over the human day is knowledge of the truth, through the Church as presence of the Truth. Not the Church of the Theologians, but the Church of the Sacraments, of the Pope's word and that of the bishops in as much as they are united to him, the Church of those who acknowledge in the humility and the suffering of the great anticipation (that conquers suffering in the gladness of hope), the word of the Pope and of the bishops who guide this reality of true Church.

Perhaps in some moments of Jesus' life, some pious woman or some humanly mature and sensitive disciple will have said, "Poor Jesus!" It is an analogy by which we can say – but with the same pity, for the same reason and the same causes: "Poor Church!" Not as a negative judgment, but as a sad observation, though full of the certainty of resurrection in the life of the Church today.

⁴³ Jn 1:9 (Vatican.va).

⁴⁴ Jn 17:6–8 (Vatican.va).

⁴⁵ Rom 12:2 (Vatican.va).

⁴⁶ Josef Zvěřina (1913–1990), Czech roman catholic priest, theologian, and art historian.

⁴⁷ J. Zvěřina, "Letter to the Christians of the West," in L. Giussani, S. Alberto, and J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 110–112.

b) Jesus as a source of *strength*. “Without me you can do nothing.”⁴⁸ I wonder how the apostles during the Last Supper, in that last supper, in that dreadful evening full of trembling and terror, listened to that sentence: “Without me you can do nothing”! Therefore, we are beggars, and the form of begging enlightened by Christ are the sacraments. For sacrament, as it is the supreme form of prayer, “must also be a plea to God, emerging from the tiniest aperture of desire for liberation.”⁴⁹

c) Lastly, as a source of *help*. “I am among you as the one who serves.”⁵⁰ “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁵¹ He becomes the servant of everybody precisely because He gives man the energy for the journey towards his destiny, that is towards Him.

Thus, all the relationships with man in Jesus are a sharing. There is no true relationship except in function of destiny: for it is towards destiny that every human need tends, every need of the participated being which is called man. When man lives this, accepts this, seeks in every relationship the destiny of the other, then all relationships are good, and in every relationship man accepts the help that comes to him from the Mystery through the other, however much or little it be, because through the other the Mystery helps man, much or little, when man lives relationships – the relationship with his companion, with the other – with the awareness of his destiny.

Thus, in any relationship we start with a positive hypothesis. The secret soul of each relationship is friendship: to want the other’s destiny, to accept that the other wants my destiny. If I acknowledge and accept that the other acts for my destiny, then this is friendship.

Christian friendship is brotherly friendship, the most familiar friendship. St Bernard described it in a wonderful way:

Charity [says St Bernard] generates friendship, it is like its mother [charity is love for the other as affirmation of his good destiny, as a desire to affirm that his right destiny should be fulfilled, for Christ is the Mystery of which He is a part, and in which He participates]. It is God’s gift, it comes from Him, for we are carnal. He causes our desire and our love to begin from the flesh. In our hearts God inscribes for our friends a love that they cannot read, but that we can show to them. The outcome is an affection, more often an *affectus*, a profound, inexpressible attachment, which is in the order of experience and which fixes rights and duties for friendship.⁵²

This is the friendship of St Peter, Simon the son of John, with Jesus, when he still did not know, he had not realized, he had not fully appreciated what Jesus ultimately wanted to say of Himself.

“It is charity that generates friendship, it is like its mother.” Charity, that is the relationship in which the other’s destiny is sought with the awareness of a person who has been called by it, in the certainty of the consciousness that the other’s destiny is Jesus, the God-made man, since through that man God enters into relationship with us.

7. Within the World History: Ecumenism and Peace

Lastly, the behaviour of Jesus towards society, precisely as an institution.

a) First of all, let us see how He behaved towards the institution, the institutional locus which is called state, nation, or, even better, fatherland, originally people, the people in that fatherland. On this point of view there are impressive quotations:

⁴⁸ Jn 15:5 (Vatican.va).

⁴⁹ L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGillQueen’s, 2001), 189–190.

⁵⁰ Lk 22:27 (Vatican.va).

⁵¹ Mt 20:28 (Vatican.va).

⁵² Cf. Saint Bernard, “Letter XI, To Guigues, the Prior, and to the other Monks of the Grand Chartreuse,” in *Life and Works of Saint Bernard Abbot of Clairvaux*, trans. and ed. by Samuel J. Eales (London: John Hodges, 1889), 1:164–175.

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”⁵³ The value of the fatherland, or of society which a people expresses, in its characteristics, and also in its limits, is here underlined. But this love for the fatherland has a destiny of usefulness for the whole world. “The forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”⁵⁴

One evening He sees his city from the hill and He weeps, thinking of her ruin:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling! Behold, your house will be abandoned. [But] I tell you, you will not see me until [the time comes when] you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”⁵⁵

Weeks later that city would kill Him, but for Him this doesn't matter. Or that other night, immediately before He was taken, in the golden splendor of the temple illuminated by the setting sun, *edákruse*, the Greek text says, He sobbed in front of His city's destiny. It is pity like that of a mother who clings to her child so he does not fall into the mortal danger he's headed for.⁵⁶

Love for the fatherland is a profound implication of Christian *pietas*, but only in as much as the fatherland is in function of earthly welfare and of the eternal good of the whole of mankind.

b) Secondly, the attitude of Jesus towards society as political power, political power, both Roman and Jewish, of his time:

So Pilate went back into the praetorium and summoned Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?” Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants (would) be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here.” So, Pilate said to him, “Then you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say I am a king.

For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” [...] Pilate [...] went back into the praetorium and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” Jesus did not answer him. So, Pilate said to him, “Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you? [...] Jesus answered (him), “You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. For this reason the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin.” [A sin greater than yours.]”⁵⁷

Political power, too, draws its possible earthly positivity only if it is in function of a universe, of everybody, of everyone in the world. Otherwise, “the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin.” This other passage of John tells us about His relationship with the Jewish power:

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.” He did not say this on his own, but since he was high priest for that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God.⁵⁸

c) Lastly, Jesus' attitude towards history.

We must imitate Jesus in his behaviour towards history, because the human glory of Christ is acknowledged by us as the meaning of history, of our own personal existence and of its total context, which is called history. “Father, the hour has come. Give glory to Your Son, so that Your Son may glorify You, just as You gave Him authority over all people, so that He may give eternal life to all You gave Him.”⁵⁹ As for Jesus the meaning of history was the fulfilment of the Father's

⁵³ Mt 15:24 (Vatican.va).

⁵⁴ Cf. Lk 24:47 (Vatican.va).

⁵⁵ Lk 13:34–35 (Vatican.va).

⁵⁶ Cf. L. Giussani, “Is It Possible to Live This Way?,” *Charity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 13.

⁵⁷ Jn 18:33–37; 19:8–11 (Vatican.va).

⁵⁸ Jn 11:49–52 (Vatican.va).

⁵⁹ Jn 17:1–2 (Vatican.va).

will (“This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ”),⁶⁰ so for man the imitation of Christ is to live every day the aim of every action as the affirmation of the meaning of history, which is Jesus Christ Himself: Christ’s human glory.

Witnessing is living for Christ’s glory. It is the phenomenon by which men acknowledge – by a powerful grace, by a powerful gift – of what reality is made, of what things themselves are made: it is made of Christ, and they shout it to everybody; they prove it by their own existence, by the transformed mode of their own existence as presence. The end of history will be the day in which the whole human universe will be compelled to acknowledge this.⁶¹

Every time in history, every measure of time deserves, that is, matches eternity, in so far as it lives the memory of Christ. Therefore, Christian morality implies that social, cultural, political commitment be educated, and so mature in the concrete ideal of a reminder of and a help in keeping the memory of Christ, and therefore the sense of history as the meaning of time and of relationships.

A morality that does not make us live every gesture, – from washing dishes to being in parliament, – in its cosmic dimension of offering to Christ cannot be a Christian morality. Offering is to acknowledge that the *substantia*, the consistency of the being that lives, that is lived in a relationship, that is expressed in a relationship, is Christ: an acknowledgment that cannot but be sustained by the prayer that He may be visible, may show and prove Himself.

So, human social life lives as its ideal what is expressed in the Letter to the Hebrews: “Exhort one another every day, as long as ‘today’ lasts, that none of you may be hardened by the seduction of sin. Exhort one another every day: recall the memory of Christ every day, remind each other of the memory of Christ. Since it is for this that we have become sharers of Christ: on condition that we keep firm to the end the trust we have had at the beginning.”⁶²

Hence the obedience that safeguards order in society. But what really safeguards order in society is authority: “Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God. [...] For rulers are not a cause of fear to good conduct.”⁶³; “Be subject to every human institution for the Lord’s sake.”⁶⁴ What man lives cannot be in contradiction with this.

Hence the commitment to serve the human community in culture, economy, politics, according to all the capacity of our gratuitousness, therefore of our free time, too, but first in our work.

Ecumenism and peace are the outcome favoured in all this. In them the actualization of a friendship tendentially universal, where human history finds its best support is affirmed, as the principle of every relationship, as the supreme contribution of every social reality. This means that Christian friendship takes part in the generation of the social reality, of the social reality as a people. That is, from the actualization of this friendship a people is born, for only in reciprocity does a man become a father, acquire a paternity, that is, generate. Fatherhood is the level where nature is self-aware, it is the human level. The animal is generator-reproducer, not father. The father is the supreme help in clarifying the meaning of life and companionship on life’s journey.

Any relationship, provided it is realized in reciprocal love, that is friendship, generates something human. This is our contribution, the contribution of the Church’s morality to peace both here and everywhere. On the contrary, what the world contributes in relationships is called violence, at every level, even in the most hidden formations, the ones most cunningly underhand, cunningly and unconsciously underhand many times, except for sudden leaps in the original fulcrum, in the original nature: father, mother and child. The leaps of mankind, however, are reduced to jerks without great power, which can do nothing on the river, on the all-sweeping worldly tide, and are therefore reduced to powerless jerks against violence, against the *hy`bris* that inevitably intervenes when God becomes extraneous, extraneous to the conception, the making of the relationship.

On the contrary, from the event of Christian friendship lived as ecumenism and peace a people is

⁶⁰ Jn 17:3 (Vatican.va).

⁶¹ Cf. L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?* (Milan: Bur, 2020), 275 ff.

⁶² Cf. Heb 3,13–14 (Vatican.va).

⁶³ Rom 13:1–3 (Vatican.va).

⁶⁴ 1 Pt 2:13 (Vatican.va).

born: it is a conception of life, a way of feeling what is real, an honesty before the circumstances, an intense answer to a provocation according to a vision, a perception of our destiny of truth and happiness. And there is not only the individual who grows up, gets married and two, or six, children are born. Imagine the hundreds of nuns of Hildegard of Bingen, and, at the same time, the monks of Peter the Venerable, in Cluny, and all the people who flocked there. This is the way in which, slowly, from the barbarity that dominated the 5th and 6th centuries, the Christian family came out, with its typical tenderness of sentiments, the capillarity of attentions, the clarity of commands and laws; “the Christian family as organism and as home, the true home for man: help, shelter, hospitality, song.”⁶⁵

To identify the ideals gathered in the word ecumenism and in the word peace with an earthly power contradicts all of this. Power transforms these ideals, these very ideals, into violence: ecumenism becomes the affirmation of one’s position, closed and violent, or an intemperate denial of every meaning, every relevance, every esteem; and peace becomes a formula made into a password for winning your own war.

Violence always implies the attempt to destroy a people, at all times: the violence of armies, of magistrates, or even of the religious realities in which religiosity does not find an open adherence and real consequentiality.

All the education imparted by power drives man, the family, the conception of social life, the way of relating with others to violence, which is the method of relationship with others. Power endorses all forms of ultimate strangeness, which are the beginning of this violence in the world.

On the contrary, no presence is a stranger to the man who follows Christ. So, “If you are what you ought to be, you will set fire to all Italy.”;⁶⁶ “Do not be satisfied with little things, because God wants great things!”;⁶⁷ thus St Catherine, the illiterate young woman from Siena, wrote.

But the Mystery as mercy remains the last word, even on all the ugly possibilities of history. The Mystery as mercy. This is the most irresistible embrace, in its evident compassion, of Being, the source of Being, the aim of Being, the nature of Being; it is the whole relationship of Being with my nothingness, with me, which He made, and which he granted to participate in Him. This is the ultimate embrace of the Mystery, against which man – even the man who is most distant, most perverse, most darkened and loving of darkness – can oppose nothing, can raise no objection: he can desert Him, but in this case he would be deserting himself and his own good. The Mystery as mercy remains the ultimate word even on all the ugly possibilities of history.

⁶⁵ L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, 420. (Our translation.)

⁶⁶ Saint Catherine of Siena, *Letter to Stefano di Corrado Maconi*, n. 368.

⁶⁷ Cf. Saint Catherine of Siena, *Letter to brother Bartolomeo Dominici and brother Tommaso d’Antonio*, n. 127.

Assembly

Stefano Alberto (Fr Pino): For that young woman the beginning of every day, the beginning of every gesture, every action was marked, penetrated by, and full of the awareness of that Presence, of the human presence of that child, and later of that man: a companionship of the Mystery accompanying Mary's destiny, the Mystery's human companionship for us on our journeying.

*Angelus*⁶⁸

*Morning prayer*⁶⁹

Giancarlo Cesana: We received hundreds of questions, as is traditional by now. The questions show one thing: that we were faced with a new proposal, an unexpected one too, on which we must work and reflect. This should come as no surprise because the Exercises train us to reach our objective which is life. They introduce us to the great journey of life.

I will now ask Fr Pino some questions concerning points that were repeatedly asked during the assemblies, and then I will pose two fundamental questions to Fr Giussani.

First question (the questions addressed to Fr Pino concern especially the theme of freedom): "Could you go back over the issue of freedom, and explain what is meant by 'freedom is the only point that cannot be attacked by reason'?"

Fr Pino: "The only point that cannot be attacked by reason" means above all that it is the only point where the Mystery remains mystery, totally mystery, because – Fr Giussani stressed this passage in his lesson – the fact that things are not self-made is evident to reason, that I in this moment am not making myself is evident to reason. Reason does not understand how this happens, it cannot understand how, but that things in this instant are from Another, this is evident.

But there is a point which reason really cannot attack: reason cannot understand precisely the fact of freedom as a possibility to acknowledge the Mystery or not. It is in this point that the Mystery remains unassailable.

Luigi Giussani: Nothing can be added to Being as such, or taken from it: but freedom seems to take away something from the Mystery of being, from God, because freedom brings also a possibility that the creature, the participated being, becomes the devil, falsehood, denying the aspect of receiving. Freedom is the possibility that the participated being sets itself against God, his participated being comes to deny, to contest God as the source that communicates Being.

Cesana: The second question came directly from Madrid: "What did you mean when you said that we must obey the authorities (I think you meant the civil authorities)? And in what sense does this not contradict what you had said before about the state as God-idol?"

⁶⁸ The ancient prayer of the Angelus commemorates the Annunciation, when "the Word became flesh." (The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary. / And she conceived of the Holy Spirit. / Behold the handmaid of the Lord. / Be it done unto me according to Thy Word. / And the Word was made flesh. / And dwells among us. / *Hail Mary ...* / Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God. / That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ // Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts that we to whom the incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His passion and cross be brought to the glory of His resurrection. / Through Christ our Lord. / Amen / *Glory be.*)

⁶⁹ Morning prayers are the prayers (of the Liturgy of the Hours of the Catholic Church) that open the day with the psalms. These prayers characterize a communitarian personality: it is an original initiative of the individual, even in the chorus of the assembly, and it is communitarian expression, even in the solitude of one's own home. Each day of the Spiritual Exercises begins with the communal reading out of the Morning Prayers from The Book of Hours, keeping what is called the *recto tono*: it is a linear, uniform execution, in which everybody, quietly, keeps a single note.

Fr Pino: There is no contradiction in the two points made, because what we wanted to strike at is the idolatrous claim of every authority that wants to base authority on itself, that is, to be the exclusive source of decision concerning the I. What we want to strike at is the state's claim to be the exclusive source of what the I is and of what the I can do.

Every authority – not only that of the state – even that of the Church, of husband and wife, of parents for their children, of the school, even that among friends – any authority, any power that claims to be founded exclusively on itself contains falsehood, to a greater or lesser extent, a deception, therefore it is inevitably a violence, precisely because it tends to be an absolute claim.

On the contrary, true authority is the point that cares for the other's destiny; the authority is good since – this was the conclusive passage yesterday – it cares for the common good and the possibility of destiny, therefore in as much as it accepts that the destiny of the I, and that the I itself have its origin elsewhere, be constituted by Another, be original by relationship with the Mystery.

It is only this, it is only the acknowledgment of this that can conquer the inevitable falsehood underlying every power to a greater or lesser extent.

Cesana: The third question: “What is meant by ‘sin is to follow a stranger’?”

Fr Pino: Sin is following a stranger, that is, following an attraction that does not lead towards destiny, an answer which is off the path. Sin is really following an answer that does not correspond to the desire for happiness, the desire for fulfilment that my heart is. It seems something normal, it seems something that can answer that desire, but no sooner do I follow it than I discover that the idol has a mouth and does not speak: it does not keep its promises. The extraneousness is precisely in respect to destiny, to the goal, to happiness: something that is outside, external to our happiness, that cannot accomplish it.

Cesana: And lastly, Pino, a practical question: “Does the imitation of Christ coincide with imitating the charism?”

Fr Pino: The imitation of Christ is imitation of Christ, of his person. But for me, in the end, this would remain ultimately the content of a devotion or of a feeling, were it not to pass through the here and now of a face, a temperament, a history. For me the encounter with Christ has been with a face, a person. Christ, the man Jesus, in his contemporariness, in his here and now is, for us, the charisma, the historical locus through which Christ says: “Come and see.”

Cesana: Now there are two fundamental questions for Fr Giussani, which relate to what was a very frequent request in the faxes we received: the relationship between the title “You, or about Friendship” and the lessons.

Many have asked to understand more. We have picked two questions that we think particularly meaningful from this point of view.

The first is: “We were particularly struck by the judgment given on the fact that the redeeming point of the I is first of all ontological rather than ethical, as the power attempts to make us believe. Is it possible to go deeper into this?”

The other question is: “It seems that what pertains to us is prayer defined as asking for being. I pray for many things I have at heart but what do you mean by ‘asking for being’?”

Giussani: The first question is about the relationship between ontological and ethical. Ontological is that for which a thing is real, as it is in reality, the way in which a thing is real.

If I need to use a spoon, excuse the comparison, but, if I have to use a spoon, I cannot pick it up by kicking it with my foot: I must pick it up with my hand, get a good grip on it. I cannot, for instance, get hold of the wrong end and then eat from the handle. Ethics derives from the consideration and the awareness of reality, from something in its reality, for it makes us behave as the thing requires. Otherwise, we can treat something wrongly, we can get hold of the wrong end of

the stick, and miss the heart of the matter.

What was the second question?

Cesana: That we pray for many things, but what does it mean asking for being, praying to be? “I pray for many things I have at heart, but what do you mean by ‘asking for being’?”

Giussani: What you have at heart, my friend, is an answer that you will not receive completely till the end. What you have at heart is a mode with which you acknowledge in a partial and ephemeral, transitory, non-definitive, incomplete reality, that which is your only desire, or the sum-total of your desire, which is happiness.

This is why your asking for being stresses the fact that what you want, what you desire, what you ask for, is nothing but the request for the satisfaction that you expect to be total in a particular aspect of your person, of your life. If you expect the whole from a particular, from holding the particular in your hand, you are mistaken.

CHRIST THE LIFE OF LIFE

1. “He Did and Taught”

We started with these two questions: what is God to man, and how can we know Him in this way, in as much as we say we know Him?

The first answer is ontological, that is, it starts from reality as it is, from the reality of God as He is, from what God is, in order to suggest, to find a suggestion regarding how we should behave towards this God. How can we know God in such a way that His reality may take on an ethical meaning for us, may show us how we can behave, what our behaviour should be in front of Him?

The starting point is ontological, it starts from reality as it is. For man, God is everything! And being, that which is, reality, is God; it is contained in the phrase “God is all,” the whole of being. Outside God there is nothingness, not something else.

So, man truly acknowledges what God is only if in all that he does he entreats God for being – and every action is entreaty to God for being, that is for happiness, for being (everyone has a goal in which one will finally and totally be oneself). Every action is entreaty to God for being, that is, it is prayer, because every action of the I, as a phenomenon in which existence becomes true, by which the existence of the I comes true, is an attempt to affirm our own fulfilment.

“You [Christians],” Péguy said, “touch God everywhere.”⁷⁰ Whatever we touch, whatever we enter into relationship with, we are looking for our fulfilment. Therefore, every awareness of an action, every time an action is aware, it is an entreaty to be, an entreaty to Being for being, an entreaty the participated being addresses to Being in order to be, in order to exist always, for all that he has received, for all that he is.

The second answer draws from the ontological discovery – God is all, and man is participated being, a self-communication of the Mystery which is Being – a matter of conscience, and of ethical conscience, that is, of behaviour. For, if God is a given reality, if God is all (there are no other words to be used), if God for man is everything, and He appears to reason as the source of being, but man does not understand, and does not remember, it is as if God were not there. For most of us every day that passes is filled up with this sin. The word “sin” is precise, but it carries not the bonhomie but the dejection of when we say, “Look, so and so has done this, what a pity! He has lost his common sense!” And similarly, for God, “He was not acknowledged, what a pity!”

How can we know Him in this way? How can we know with certainty and clarity that He is everything, so that man cannot act without asking for what he has already had from Him: being, participation in being, created being, that is, participated being?

How can we know Him? Well, we have to become aware of Him. Awareness concerns first of all the cognitive power rational man has. Reason is awareness of reality according to the totality of its factors. Therefore, becoming aware of something is to discover the object in question according to its totality, the object we are talking about, the object which interests me, the object on the agenda: God, how man conceives God, how God appears, how God must appear to man.

Thus reason, once it realizes that God is the source of everything, that the Mystery lies at the origin of everything, is also keen to discover how to behave towards God, how we should treat God, and therefore to discover the paths that lead on to the moral law.

But here we had to indicate a qualitative jump that is truly enigmatic.

The Mystery, source and destiny of the whole of created reality, wanted there to be a man born of woman, who lived through the human career as any man, the man Jesus of Nazareth, and, as He wanted to communicate Himself to men through this man, the Mystery made this man his own, from the first moment of his conception, mysteriously taking up the I of this man in the I of the Word, the second person of the Holy Trinity, and therefore directly sharing in God’s nature: supreme mystery in the history of man and of the cosmos. This is why Jesus of Nazareth is “Jesus called the Christ.”

⁷⁰ Cf. Ch. Péguy, *Véronique. Dialogo della storia e dell’anima carnale* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 2002), 256.

Watching, listening to and following this man is the whole source of Christian morality. The Mystery wanted the man Jesus so that He might be first of all an instrument of teaching to all men, of the supreme teaching of life which is the teaching about God, the only Master (“Don’t call yourselves masters, only one is your master. You are all disciples, brothers”).⁷¹ Therefore, in what He made, He was an example of what He said in a masterly way, of what he communicated as teaching: He did and taught. The Lord Jesus did and taught.

Speaking of God, we can only teach something which has pre-occupied us, something that has occupied our soul, the whole of our soul before.

The most sublime thing about a moral attitude like that which Christ teaches us is that every action – as relationship with God, with Jesus, with the humanity of the individual and of society – is friendship. Every human relationship is either friendship or otherwise it lacks something, it is defective or false.

This is why the man Jesus said, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.”⁷² Thus, He was both teacher and master, a teacher for all men, passing through His death, accepting death for men: “He who loved me and gave Himself up for me,”⁷³ St Paul said.

Every relationship is friendship in that it is a gift, it represents a gift or it has the possibility of being one, which comes from God, or from Christ, or from the Church, or from man’s history: it is a gift, friendship, which we welcome. All that God, Christ, the Church, or the history of mankind as something communicable to all men gives us a gift we welcome and accept. Accepting and welcoming this gift makes reciprocal the love that He, who gave it to us, possesses, displays, and shows. Accepting it is the love that we show to Him who gave us the gift.

In this sense friendship is a reciprocity of gift, of love, because for a created being, like man, the supreme form of love for God is to accept that you are made by God, to accept to be, to accept being which is not one’s own but is given.

2. An Event in the Present

The presence of Jesus Christ, which is in every day and every hour of the life of the baptized, of one who has been chosen by Him to whom the Father has given all men is an event.

The presence of Jesus Christ is for all mankind because the baptized person is one chosen as the passage, the point of communication of what God offers man, of the gift He makes of Himself to man, to the whole of mankind. Let us think, for instance of this in particular: if I am baptized, I was baptized so that the power of the Mystery which has transformed me in baptism, wanted to pass through me in order to reach others along many paths and occasions. This is the ontology of the new relationship with everything: the relationship between the baptized and the others comes from the aim that the Mystery, in baptism, gave us. The Mystery has begun to make us know, with the energy that He gave us in baptism, the aim He had in choosing us. This is the source of the ethics, the behaviour to be followed, that I must follow when I become aware of my baptism, which cannot be forgotten in any action; on no day, in no hour has man the right to forget this choice. The aim of this choice penetrates the whole organics of the human phenomenon, of the human gesture, of man’s commitment: it penetrates everything in order to reach an aim that surpasses it on every side. In this sense we have always said that the instant has an eternal value, it is an enacted relationship with infinity, like the greatest action, the greatest epic, the greatest story.

So, the presence of Jesus Christ is an *event* – according to the perception given us (quite persuasively!) by our charism. It is an event that we encounter in the present, in the now, in circumstances, which spread the evidence of a vocational companionship as emergence of the mystery of the Church, the mysterious Body of Christ.

⁷¹ Cf. Mt 23:8.10 (Vatican.va).

⁷² Cf. Lk 22:42 (Vatican.va).

⁷³ Cf. Ef 5:2 (Vatican.va).

A supernatural reality is a human reality in which the mystery of Christ is present, a natural reality in which the mystery of Christ is present (natural in the sense that it shows itself and becomes specific in a human face). It is the Church that emerges close to me; it emerged close to me in precise circumstances, with my father and my mother, and then when I joined the seminary, and then when I began to meet people who became attentive and friendly to me because I was saying certain things, and, in the end, I was somehow channeled into a companionship that made and makes the mystery of the Church immediate for me. It is therefore an emergence of the Body of Christ. It is the company we call vocational, that is, the company that involves because it generates and is generated by the experience in which the charism has touched me.

St Augustine said: “*In manibus nostris sunt codices, in oculis nostris facta*”⁷⁴ (in our hands books, in our eyes facts). “*In manibus nostris sunt codices*”: the Gospels to be read, the Bible to be read ... but we would not know how to read them without the other clause, “*in oculis nostris facta*”: the presence of Jesus is nourished, comforted, proved by the reading of the Gospels and the Bible, but it is assured, it becomes evident among us through a fact, through facts that are presences. In the whole life of everybody there is a fact that has meaning, a presence which has been an influence throughout life, a presence tending to influence the whole of life: it has enlightened the way of conceiving, of feeling, of acting. This is called an event. That into which we are introduced stays truly alive, comes true every day, and so every day we become aware, we must become aware of the event as it happened to us, of the encounter we have had.

I conclude this confidential stressing of the points of my concern, by saying: Christ, this is the name that indicates and defines a reality I have encountered in my life. I have encountered: I heard of it when I was a child, as a boy, and so on. It is possible to grow up knowing the word Christ well, but for many people He is not encountered, He is not really experienced as being present. In my case Christ bumped into my life, my life bumped into Christ, precisely so that I should learn to understand that He is the central point of everything, of the whole of my life. *Christ is the life of my life*: in Him is summed up all that I would desire, all that I look for, all that I sacrifice, all that develops in me out of love for the persons with whom He has put me, that is, out of love for you.

As Möhler said in a sentence I have quoted many times, “I think I would not wish to live any longer if I could not hear him speak.”⁷⁵ This is a sentence I wrote under Carracci’s image of Christ when I was in high school. Perhaps it is one of the sentences I have remembered most in my life.

Christ, life of my life, certainty of a good destiny, and companionship in everyday life, a familiar companionship that transforms things into good. This is His efficacy in my life.

Then morality not only starts from here, but here the thread of morality is attached, fixed and saved.

St Peter did not take as the motive of his love for Christ the fact of having been forgiven his many defects, his many mistakes, his many betrayals. He did not list his own mistakes, but, when he found himself face to face with Christ after the resurrection, and when Christ asked him, “Simon, do you love me?” he answered, “Yes.” It is the relationship with His word, which is the most human and the most divine, which makes us embrace everything in our daily existence. The memory of Him has to be daily, the surge with which He becomes familiar has to be daily, the company with Him has to become glad, and the memory of Him has to leave us glad, in whatever circumstance, in whatever condition, for there He is made flesh: in you, O Lord, the love the Mystery has for me is made flesh. A certainty of reaching my happy destiny and hope throughout the unfolding of my life.

“Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” I might have made mistakes and betrayed a thousand times in thirty days, but this still stands, this must stand! I think that this is not a presumption, but a surprising, inconceivable yet ineffable grace, as Michelangelo Buonarroti said, “But, Lord, what am I to do if to my eye / no more Your ineffable courtesy appears?”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ St Augustine, *Sermo 360/B,20: Sermo sancti Augustini cum pagani ingrederentur*.

⁷⁵ Cf. A.J. Möhler, *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism*, trans. C. Erb (Washington, D.C: Catholic Univ. of America Press, Reprint edition, 2015), 120.

⁷⁶ M. Buonarroti, *The Complete Poems of Michelangelo* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 150.

Christ, and our “Yes” to Him: paradoxically I say, this is humanly the easiest aspect. I say this a bit presumptuously, and a bit enthusiastically: it is the easiest aspect, or, anyway, the most acceptable, of all the moral duty we have in the world. For Christ is the word that explains everything: Christ is a man who lived as everybody else two thousand years ago, but who, risen from the dead, invested by the power of the Mystery – in which by then He participated in His own nature – takes hold of us day after day, hour after hour, action after action.

The totality of the presence of the Mystery and its claim on our lives (“God is all in all”) and of Christ, of Jesus of Nazareth, of the young man of Nazareth Jesus, who is the Mystery made Christ, His Christ, the totality of the one, of the great figure, of the enormous figure, of the enormous hint which God, which the word God is in our heart and on our lips, the totality of this familiar, daily, and efficacious presence of this company as strange as it is evidently insuperable. This totality explains our “You.” To God we must say, “You,” and “You, O Christ,” we must say to the man Jesus of Nazareth.

Both the Mystery and His physical presence in our life, all of this is the source of the relationship we have with the truth and with the whole of reality, and it also becomes the source of what we have called friendship. There is no relationship before You, O Christ, whenever I encounter You thinking of You in the memory of You, I can have no human relationship, of any kind, with anyone, without the theme, the ideal of friendship being pursued. You looked at all those to whom you spoke, or who answered You, or with whom there was no dialogue at all, even Pilate, even the Jewish high priests; the relationship You had with them was full, as it is proved by your passion, it was full of passion for their destiny, for the destiny of their persons, and your involvement with them presented you as being full of love for them. If they had welcomed, if they had come to agree with you, the word friendship would have been the only one they could have used for the relationship with You. The word friendship is the only one we can use for our relationship with Him.

St Maximus the Confessor, a great father of the Church, gives us this admirable summary, that we quoted above:

Christ is [...] all in all of us [whether we are good or bad, whether we are distracted, whether we are offside or inside], He who embraces everything in Himself according to the unique, infinite, and most wise power of his bounty, as a centre into which all lines converge [all the lines of creation: this is the ontological birth, the gaze of ontology from which all our attitude in life must be born] – so that the creatures of the one God may not remain strangers and enemies to each other, but have a common locus where they can manifest their friendship and their peace.⁷⁷

This is the synthesis of the spirit with which we have spoken and thought during these days.

⁷⁷ St Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, I.