

**Notes from the Communion and Liberation leaders' meeting
with Davide Prospero and Francesco Cassese
on Pope Francis' letter to the whole movement**

Milan and via video connection from Italy and around the world, February 20, 2024

Francesco Cassese. Today we are gathered together—members of the Diaconia of Lombardy in person and the leaders of the movement in Italy, and around the world, via video connection—to better understand the meaning and contents of the letter that Pope Francis sent to Davide and to the whole movement last January 30.

We felt that it was important to organize this meeting for two main reasons: firstly, because of the importance and value that this letter has for our history and, precisely for this reason, we want to avoid running the risk of underestimating it; secondly, to try to address together the many questions that have arisen after the positive reaction we all felt when we received and read it.

We asked Davide to help us look at this letter together. It will then be the responsibility of each of us to communicate what emerges to our communities. In preparing tonight's work, we started from a dialogue between leaders that took place last week, from the many contributions and questions that came in and for which we thank you. This is the first sign of the responsibility we bear together. I am the spokesperson for this dialogue.

I would like to say that this letter concerns all of us, no one should feel excluded because, on the one hand, as St Paul says, we are members of one another; on the other hand, we believe and are convinced that there is a step of consciousness in it for the whole movement.

As you know, this letter originates from the audience that Davide, together with Monsignor Santoro, had with the Holy Father last January 15. I therefore begin by asking if you could tell us about this meeting.

Davide Prospero. First of all, I thank you for the many contributions you have sent, because it is a sign that there is a particular sensitivity among us and I believe this is a very important factor.

I remember—we all remember—the famous meeting in Rome, on Palm Sunday 1975, when Giussani heard Paul VI say to him in the sacristy: “Take heart, you and your young people, because this is the right road” (*The Life of Luigi Giussani*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2018, p. 514). In that instant he remembered that the then Archbishop Montini had said something similar to him at the end of the 1950s, faced with the positive outcome of the Citizen Mission in which Giussani had involved the whole of GS: “I do not understand your ideas and your methods very well, but I see the fruits, and I tell you, go ahead like this” (*ibid.*, p. 217). That “go ahead like this” has marked our entire path; how many times did Father Giussani repeat it to us!

I believe that today we are faced with something that has the same significance, because this letter is a confirmation and a revival, exactly like those words. And no one then dreamed to start shouting “I do not understand the methods”, because the focus was all on “I see the fruits... go ahead like this.”

It is important that all the questions we have are real questions, in order to move forward and help us understand each step in the text. Incidentally, Giussani also took that “I do not understand the methods” seriously.

Now, to answer your question, last January 15, Monsignor Santoro and I told the Pope about the path taken by the Fraternity and the *Memores Domini* in the period since the audience in St Peter's Square on October 15, 2022: how we took up his speech and the steps we have taken. I must say that I was positively surprised to find that the Pope is very aware and informed—much more so than I had imagined—about the path we are taking and the content we have proposed, for example at the Beginning Day. This is a sign that he is following us very closely. This gives me a sense of enormous gratitude, precisely because of the disproportion that I feel: he is the supreme head of the whole

Church and we are a grain of sand. Yet he has this gaze, this friendship towards the movement. This was the perception I had.

In fact, the words of the letter reflect the content of the dialogue we had with him. Therefore, trust the letter and not the articles that came out on blogs...

Cassese. First of all, I find words of encouragement and comfort in the letter for the steps we are taking. As you said, this fills us with gratitude and makes us more confident in the path we are taking. Likewise, we feel our responsibility is strongly called upon. Thus I come to the first question we asked ourselves for this meeting: how does this letter challenge our lives?

Prosperi. The Pope's words are powerful and dense, full of meaning for the times we are living. I hope, therefore, that everyone will read them carefully, not simply getting a general idea of them, but that they will be understood in their various emphases and steps, and then welcomed with open heartedness, to identify with the gaze he has on the experience of faith of each of us and of our communities. It is certainly a very important document, as other Church realities have also noted. We wished to publish the letter that Margaret Karram, President of the Focolarini, sent to me on the CL website, who judged that the Pope's words were also interesting and useful to her.

My first reaction was naturally one of profound gratitude for how the Holy Father wishes to accompany us so closely. It was not due; at least for me, this gesture was not due at all! Even though it is the 70th anniversary of the movement and it is Giussani's anniversary (as happens every year), a letter that is attentive and full of tenderness, and at the same time full of profound esteem for our attempt, is truly a great gift. In it there is a clear signal of confirmation and support, I would say of friendship. It is a signal that gives us courage, because we—who sometimes are uncertain in our step—humbly set out again, knowing that we are going in the right direction.

This is perhaps the most important thing, more decisive than any other legitimate and necessary deepening that we must do. The path is the right one. This revives us in our responsibility in a, I would say, radical way. Aware of our limitations, of the smallness to which we often reduce ourselves, this revival of responsibility opens our hearts anew and cannot but make us want to convert even more, always, at every moment, as we have always told ourselves and as Giussani has always told us from the beginning.

This is where, for me, the theme of unity, which is at the heart of the letter, comes in. The path, in fact, is precisely that of unity, of communion, first of all with the Pope and the Church, and then with those whom the Church recognises as leaders of the movement.

If it is true that unity stems from a gift, it is equally true that a gift without an adherence, without a momentum of authentic following, is a wasted gift. For oneself and ultimately for all.

Therefore, this letter is not only not to be underestimated, but it is very important for us to commit ourselves, ourselves *first and foremost*, and then help everyone to do so, to better understand what the message is, the positive provocation that the Pope is launching at us in the confirmation of his closeness and that we are on the right path.

Cassese. The potential of our charism, the Pope told us on October 15, 2022, is still largely to be discovered. At one point in the letter he encourages you to “continue the work you have undertaken, which aims to preserve [the charism's] integral vision.” What does “preserving an integral vision” mean? What do we need in order not to lapse into a partial—the Pope writes “unilateral”—vision of the charism? How do we maintain an attitude of vigilance in this regard?

Prosperi. This is precisely the path we are trying to take in these months: first of all, the revival of what Giussani proposed to us, a look back at the memory of the founder (think of the revival of the “PerCorso” in the School of Community and the Beginning Day), in comparison with the challenges of the current context. As I said at the beginning, the Pope was aware of the proposal and content of

the Beginning Day; and it is with reference to this, in particular, that he emphasized that we are on the right path.

In the same way, the educational proposal is emphasizing the importance of our presence in the fundamental dimensions of culture, charity and mission (you will recall that, during the audience on October 15, 2022, the Pope also spoke about this, speaking of ours as an “extraordinary history of charity, culture and mission”). Up to resuming the expansion of our presence in the recognition of the value of works and mutual aid in the attempt to reach a common judgement with respect to the challenges that affect civil society; this is true especially for adults, but it is also true for our young people, for the educational realities (CLU, GS). After all, the theme of unity is played out in all dimensions and ages of life.

This work, as the Pope told us on October 15, implies an attitude of the heart: ““Humble men or women are those who are concerned not simply with the past, but also with the future, since they know how to look ahead, to spread their branches, remembering the past with gratitude. The humble give life, attract others and push onwards towards the unknown that lies ahead. The proud, on the other hand, simply repeat, grow rigid [...] and enclose themselves in that repetition, feeling certain about what they know and fearful of anything new because they cannot control it; they feel destabilized... because they have lost their memory” (“Let this holy prophetic and missionary restlessness burn in your hearts”, p. 14, *english.clonline*).

The integral vision of the charism—the discovery of the whole of the charism—is the constant goal of our path: we can never say “we have it, we own it”. The important thing is to walk in the right direction. The integral vision is not an achieved goal, but what we are walking towards. It was given to us at the beginning as a path to follow, not as a definition to learn and repeat. I would like to emphasize here that I was struck by the fact that, rather than wanting to explain what the integral vision is (listing the factors to be kept in mind or to be eliminated), the Pope tells us what the method by which this happens is: following. This is the fundamental meaning of the second part of the letter. The method is to follow the high road and the high road is objectively indicated by the person leader. Among other things, it is precisely part of the integrity of the charism to be aware of ecclesiality. In this sense, each of us can verify what our reaction was when faced with this letter: a gratitude, a “I want to understand what is written, I will ask about what I do not understand”; or a complaining, like “what more does he have to say? Why does he always go back to the same things?”. The charism interests us within the entire gaze of the Church. Without this one would not even understand Father Giussani.

Cassese. On the invitation to avoid unilateralism, some contributions refer to the need to better clarify the meaning of the words the Pope said to us during the audience of October 15 in St. Peter’s Square: What does pluriformity in unity mean? How does pluriformity help unity? We understand that there is always the risk of brandishing the theme of pluriformity to assert one’s own measure or sensitivity, to defend oneself from following. Can you elaborate on this issue, in a positive way?

Prosperi. Let me make a small premise. The issue here is how pluriformity helps unity; not how unity does not inhibit pluriformity! There is an order of priorities, and we must understand what that means. As we read in the Assisi booklet in December, communion among us is hardly the crutch that supports our individual experience of faith. Instead, it is from our communion that we get a clarity of outlook, the broad, total horizon that Christ introduces into our human experience.

This is not just about the way we see things. This also has very practical implications. I remember that the first times I took part in the meetings of the leaders, around Father Giussani there were personalities of great depth and with very strong temperaments, all different from each other: Piccinini, Vittadini, Cesana, Father Giorgio Pontiggia, Father Negri, Father Baroncini, Father Pino, and so on. Sometimes you clashed (as still happens now, with those who are still there!). But you understood that the man enjoyed holding this diversity together. What made unity was not that we

were all aligned in repeating the same refrain; and if someone said something off the rails, they were not shot. That is not what makes unity!

Communion is within a diversity that however (that however!) tends towards the same goal, following the same path, whereby the other becomes indispensable for you, becomes important, fundamental. You discover that God has given them to you because without them, who is so different from you, you would not reach that totality that your heart desires. Otherwise you would not really need them; perhaps you would need them from the point of view of your psychological peace of mind, to feel confirmed, but you would not need them for you, to grow, to become greater and therefore more certain of the presence of Christ. Because, as Giussani says, through all the teachers that are given to us on this journey, ultimately you discover that there is only one true Master.

I will come back to this later, but let me make a fundamental point: when we say that we must recognise the Master, what we must recognise is that there is only one Master.

We could ask ourselves: without Father Giussani, would that clique of such different personalities have been able to stay together? I speak for what I have experienced: certainly not, for two reasons that also concern us today and not only those who have lived in contact with Father Giussani's personality.

The first reason is that we did not decide to be there. We became friends by being there; we probably would not have even met if we had not been called, summoned together by someone else. Why would Piccinini have known Cesana? Why would they have become friends? Because they were chosen by another (Father Giussani, in this case) and called together. Why should I have got to know Piccinini, Cesana, Giorgio, Giussani himself? And why should we have become friends? Because we were all chosen by an Other and called together. Self-awareness (beyond what one may think of one's own qualities and limitations) lies in responding to this call. This puts you together with the other who is called with you. And it founds our unity, which is greater than our ideas and our interpretations of the charism.

But there is a second reason, which (like the first, in its meaning) also applies now that Giussani is no longer here. The second reason is that there is (there was and still is) an authority. And this, I said, was valid yesterday, is valid today and always. It is the recognition of someone who is given and who makes it easy for us to follow. This authority leads us to follow what you follow. The point of verification is not if we are good friends or how attached we are to the authority as a person, but how much we learn and love what the authority is following, as Ratzinger reminded us at Father Giussani's funeral: "He has truly become the father of many [...] by guiding people not to himself but to Christ" (A. Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, op. cit., p. 1168).

The task of authority is to safeguard the riverbanks and mark the way. Without this, there is no path. Within this path, there are those who go further ahead, there are those who stay behind and you have to wait for them. And if someone goes further ahead and pulls more, then the authority must underline this, helping everyone to recognise that the Mystery is communicating itself more meaningfully for the historical moment in which we are, for our judgement with respect to the world, to the Church and to our reality, through certain persons, certain presences, which we must all follow. This is the way in which the Mystery makes us take steps.

Then we are helped to understand the reasons and thus we are facilitated to follow. This is what authority must do: help us have the adequate reasons to follow the circumstance God asks us to obey. Otherwise, if we did not have the positive reasons, if we did not recognize the convenience of following, we would follow like mules that must be dragged along by force; but it would not be true following.

We can only experience freedom and fullness in diversity because we are united at the root: this communion is founded on the fact that we have been chosen and put together by Another for a mission in the world. If we lose sight of this, little by little, even the person who has been chosen with you will become an enemy, because they are an obstacle to the realization of your project.

Giussani said: "The great instrument of change in the world is ecclesial unity, not the intelligence of individual conscience or the craftiness of one's own culture or the progressivism of one's own spirit"

(*Il movimento di Comunione e Liberazione. 1954-1986. Conversazioni con Robi Ronza* [The movement of Communion and Liberation. 1954-1986. Conversations with Robi Ronza], Bur, Milan 2014, p. 87 note 2).

Without the constant reference to our being together on a guided path, the affirmation of pluriformity becomes an alibi for doing our own thing and dragging others into our intellectual jaunts, however fascinating they may seem. There can be no ‘various souls’ in our movement (which would be an elegant way of saying ‘various currents’), because we are one soul. This story of ‘various souls’ is as abstract as it gets from what we are saying; if that were the case, by inviting someone to follow you, you would be taking them away from the souls of others, especially those who are indicated as leaders. This is precisely the principle of personalism.

Cassese. The Pope advises us to “take care of the unity among you”. This brings to mind what Jone wrote to us: “Throughout this time, Carras lived with a radical concern and desire for the unity of the movement” (‘A sweet companionship’, Letter from Jone Echarri, January 17 2024, *english.clonline*). The book on Andrea Aziani is also full of recommendations from Father Giussani to Andrea on the subject of unity and from Andrea to his friends, first in Siena and then in Peru. You mentioned earlier that unity is a gift, but it takes an initiative on our part to accept it. There are many questions on this subject. How do we take care of it, if it is not something we do but something we discover among ourselves? If unity is a gift, what initiative is required of us? What does it mean to take care of the unity among ourselves?

Prosperi. First of all, we need to understand why it is so important to focus on this. In this regard, the Pope tells us that it is unity among us that is the true guardian of the fruitfulness of the charism: “In fact, it alone, in following the pastors of the Church, will in time be able to safeguard the fruitfulness of the charism.” Safeguard the fruitfulness, “it alone”! This means that it is not so much a matter of having the most correct interpretation that will guarantee the fruitfulness of the charism, but it is unity. It may seem paradoxical, because it is something that in any case—we know well—does not depend on us. So what does it have to do with us? I do not know if we realize not only the importance, but the beauty of this statement, which Giussani, perhaps in other words, always emphasized. I say ‘beauty’ because unity, tension towards unity, is always possible. It is always accessible, even in the worst situation in which one feels the threat of division, if not the pain of ongoing divisions. What I mean is that this phrase of the Pope’s frees us from the sterility of certain positions, of certain dialectical clashes.

Listen to what Father Giussani said at the 1991 *Memoires Domini* Summer Exercises in Corvara: “Christ never calls one alone. He always calls them within a context. If one does not recognize this context they impose themselves on others [...]. In short: love for unity is the greatest and hardest thing; it is the greatest miracle of a new personality. Without that love for unity there is no miracle. [...] Unity, the embrace of unity is the first characteristic, the fundamental symptom of the miracle that Christ has entered into me. [On the contrary] The first sign that Christ is [only] formally in me and objectively I impose myself is the renunciation of unity, [...] it is the non-obedience and non-following [...]. I follow Paul, I follow Apollo, I follow Cephas, I follow Father X, I follow Father Y. No! I follow Christ even though originally Christ used Paul, Cephas, Apollo. [...] The supreme miracle is the unity that I recognize, accept, suffer and love with those whom he has placed near me” (“Passiamo all’altra riva” [Let us move to the other shore], Summer Exercises of the *Memoires Domini* Association, Corvara, 27 July-1 August 1991, *pro manuscripto*, pp. 63-64).

The Pope’s indication is very specific: what fosters the continuity of the charism is not the right interpretation, the dialectic that can be established between us on the nuances of the charism, but unity. I repeat this precisely because several times I have received, directly or indirectly, questions or complaints about the fact that we keep talking about unity. Perhaps because we have not yet truly understood what is at stake.

Listen again to what Father Giussani says in the book interview with Robi Ronza, judging one of the most dramatic moments in our history (and not only ours), 1968, when the divisions became manifest: “What first damaged this experience several years after it had begun was the reaffirmation of a concept of the Church in which the categories of unity and authority, above all, were understood in a way that was, in my opinion, ephemeral and generic, in any case different from the traditional understanding among us. [...] According to me and others, the reality that saves man and the world is Christ and the Church, of which the unity of believers (among themselves and with authority) is the supreme expression and sign in history. Therefore, first and foremost, and in any case, as we said, this unity with authority and among ourselves must be saved” (*Il movimento di Comunione e Liberazione. 1954-1986...* [The movement of Communion and Liberation. 1954-1986...], op. cit., pp. 63, 62).

This emphasis on unity is not only true because it is in the Gospel or because Giussani speaks about it. It is true first and foremost existentially, in fact one experiences it continuously! Each of us can document it, thinking of our own lives and the lives of others. To be concrete, let us think of our own families: it is evident that when there is no unity, one feels ill and even the most trivial difficulties become insurmountable mountains. Because if you are in a family where there is division, and there are those who agree more with mother and those who agree with father, and everyone is divided, does this make you certain? Does it make you more serene? Does it make you happier to live? Does it make you more open to hope for the future? No, it makes you more intimidated, uncertain, suffering: it paralyzes you! You grow more confused! Only from the experience of a lived unity does a certain humanity emerge.

As I mentioned, unity is a gift that requires initiative on the part of the one who receives it, that is, the “care” of which the Pope speaks. To limit oneself to saying that it is a gift, without implying our freedom, without requiring our initiative, is to support, in fact, a disengagement. And so the gift is wasted, it bears no fruit. Giussani, precisely in reference to the “care of unity”, is very clear on this: “The image of a power that automatically overwhelms man without his initiative of freedom is against the idea of the Christian God: in fact, no gesture made by others can replace our free gesture” (*Alla ricerca del volto umano* [In Search of the Human Face], Bur, Milan 2007, p. 119).

What initiative is required? To follow. We will return to this later, but I want to anticipate one thing. What does the theme of unity have to do with warning us against personalism? This is precisely the point. Personalism stems from perceiving ourselves as the last word, from considering ourselves indispensable so that the people who follow us can continue to grow in faith and affection for Christ. And so we consider it more important that they follow such a person rather than being in communion with the body of the companionship, with what Giussani calls a “companionship guided to destiny”. We deceive those who follow us if we instil this suspicion in them. Giussani says: “The love of unity, which is also tangible and visible, is the criterion for assessing whether we love the Ideal more than a preconceived vision, our standing in the community, or ourselves. One must even accept to die for unity” (*The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2006, p. 31). I read these words to give you an idea of what depth that “care” of our unity had for him.

Cassese. What are the calls being made to us? Why does the Pope write that “we need to move beyond personalistic interpretations, unfortunately still present”? Why does he insist on things he has already said?

In the contributions we can read: “Faced with this letter, as well as the previous interventions of the Dicastery or yours, I see many people who do not understand what he is referring to or who do not want to tackle the issue head on. Perhaps this is an opportunity to clarify these calls that have been made to us for a few years. It is not so much a matter of naming and shaming. I hope everyone feels challenged by these words because they concern everyone, no one excluded. But it is worth telling us again, perhaps more explicitly, what mistakes we have made in recent years and which are still present among us. Where have we seen this?”.

We all remember the issue of the doctrine of succession, referred to in the Dicastery’s letter of June 2022. Then there was the invitation to go beyond reducing experience to subjective factors alone. On

this point, it seems to me that steps of clarity were taken at the Beginning Day. Why is the Pope now insisting on something he has already said? One person asks: “How can we help each other so that this does not happen to everyone, what can ensure that we do not fall into this error?”.

Prosperi. One can always fall into errors, the problem is getting back up again, as we well know. Let me say how I perceived this call. Thanks to the paternity with which the Pope is accompanying us, we can look these reminders in the face not only without fear, but I would say with the desire to understand them better and better. True, this is not the first time these things have been said to us. In the meantime, the one about the risk of personalism (which concerns leaders, etc.) was a fundamental concern of Father Giussani’s in the first place, it is certainly not a problem that the Pope has come up with.

Let us try to consider these reminders for what they are, within the recognition that the path is good and the indication that our task is to take care of unity. In this context, the Pope says that misunderstandings persist. Now, I would add, these misunderstandings are sometimes supported by people who have or have had a more or less formal responsibility within our companionship. I say this because I hope to provoke everyone to a renewed responsibility towards building the common work.

How often do I hear the objection: “But I have had an experience over these years, I have grown”—of course! No one questions this—“Ehere are these misunderstandings? Was I then wrong to follow?” Here we are talking about the present, the now.

So, let me try to identify the points that I see in action and from which these calls arise.

A first point concerns the claim that “unity is not the most important thing”. We must not hide the fact that there are those among us who in recent times have continued and continue to insist that unity is not the most important thing, because—they say—“there is something that comes first, there is something more important”. It is a refrain we have heard several times. And we cannot think that our people in good faith, who keep hearing this statement, do not hear a screech when they read the Pope’s letter, if they respect those who instil these ideas in them. It is precisely here that our responsibility, that of those who have a responsibility in the movement, is at stake.

If unity is not loved, it is not fulfilled, it does not become history, the criterion of our life and a witness in the world. Therefore, if this “something that comes first”—fundamental, because without Christ there is no unity—is not realized as unity among us, if it does not become in us the responsible following of an ultimate point, it remains something abstract.

A second point concerns the relationship between authority and authoritativeness (which implies the issue of the master). The Pope reminds us that we must follow whoever leads. This may seem obvious. Yet in daily experience—I am not just referring to the ultimate guide—how often do we risk reducing everything to saying: “I recognise who is authoritative for my life”. Not that this is wrong. There is nothing wrong with such a statement in itself, of course I can recognize who is authoritative for my person. The problem is not there, but arises when everything is reduced to that and another refrain begins to resound, which instead has important implications with respect to the path of reflection the Church is taking on the nature and governance of ecclesial movements. We could summarize the conception that has been corrected as follows: “The guide in a charismatic reality is the master, and everyone recognises their master”. People keep saying: “But why should the Pope say that one must follow the person who leads, when I recognise who is authoritative for my life, where the charism vibrates most”, or similar things. This is what the Pope is talking about. These are anything but fantasies, because they are things that, at least I, but I know also many others, have happened to hear. This way of thinking situates the theme of authoritativeness in contrast to authority, ultimately eliminating the difference between one and the other, which also forms part of Father Giussani’s

teaching. It eludes the objectivity of the relationship with authority, of the method of following. I offer a couple of quotations from Giussani, which are very clear in this regard.

They asked Father Giussani: “What is the relationship between the authority of the charism and personal authority?”

His answer: “The authority in the charism, to be very simple, is that which the Church recognizes. The Church recognizes the responsibility of a charism. Personal authority is given by the participation one experiences with those in authority” (*Un avvenimento nella vita dell'uomo* [An event in the life of man], Bur, Milano 2020, p. 249).

Whoever lives participation with those in authority helps everyone to follow authority cordially. Giussani speaks of participation: you must be the first to follow, because if you follow, then you become authoritative. It is not enough to say: “You must follow”, because one must be involved, participate in what invites you to follow. That can be, indeed must be, an adult participation, therefore also—where necessary—dialectical, but always within a following. It is not enough to say: “I recognise that there is an indicated leader”, and then not follow us first. What will those who are following me see, beyond the verbal call to follow? Giussani observes: “If you limit yourself to passive obedience it is not true obedience. Obedience requires the compliance of our entire self, with all our faculties” (*The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2006, p. 114).

Cassese. You have introduced the theme of obedience. In the concluding part of the letter, the Holy Father writes: “In this period, so decisive for your history after the death of the founder, I therefore address to all the members of the movement an invitation to follow the path taken, under the guidance of the Church, and to collaborate willingly and loyally with those who are called to guide the movement. Only this obedience, continually rediscovered and nourished, can ensure an ever richer experience of Christian life among you and the renewal of your presence in the world, for the good of the whole Church.”

Can you help us focus on the connection between preserving unity and obedience? Why is following reasonable and not an alienation? Why is it not a limitation that stifles our freedom?

Prosperi. We have just heard that for Father Giussani obedience is an identification with the reasons given by another. It seems clear to me that this does not mean imposing a line. Comparison and dialogue are always between people who put their freedom at stake. If freedom binds, and this has happened otherwise we would not be here, then one cannot but wish to identify with those we are asked to follow. It is an identification that goes thus far—these are Father Giussani’s words to the Fraternity: “This is exactly the great rule: ‘Made obedient to the point of death’, to the death of one’s own way of thinking, of feeling; the opposite of ‘what seems and pleases’, the great rule of the world” (*La verità nasce dalla carne* [Truth is born of the flesh], Bur, Milan 2019, p. 129).

And on another occasion, again at the Fraternity Exercises, he added: “This is why the mention of obedience marks one of the major points for adherence to our companionship. It is not necessary, in order to be Christians and to be saved, to belong to our companionship; but in order to belong to our companionship it is necessary to have certain things. The indisputably fundamental one, for a change of heart in the sense that I said this morning, is obedience, obedience to the shared, the guided flow. I always tell the *Memores Domini* that the rule is a companionship guided towards destiny.” (*Una strana compagnia* [A strange companionship], Bur, Milan 2017, pp. 48-49).

However, what sometimes happens? That one says: “I obey”, meaning, however, to simply state: “I am not against it”. To unreservedly empathize is something else. As Jone told me about when she and Carras came to Italy to set up the International Centre in Rome, in obedience to a request from the movement through Father Giussani. Jone told me that when they landed in Rome they said to each other: “Today we have burnt the boat!”. But when is this reasonable and not alienation or self-denial? This is only possible if one is certain of the path. Instead, if there is an underlying doubt about the path, you do not make it! You cannot cope emotionally, no matter how hard you try. Let us think about whether this is not the case even in small things. Here, in my opinion, is the big issue that concerns

us all, not just now, but always. It is one of the problems we face. Identifying oneself without reserve is what Jesus asks of the rich young man: “Are you willing to leave everything?”

We already answered this a little at the Beginning Day. Now I want to add an element in the light of the journey we have made and the letter the Pope has written to us. Leaving everything behind is only reasonable if it takes place within two riverbanks (as we have learned from the beginning of our history): on the one hand, the heart, that is, experience and personal verification. On the other hand, simultaneously—because it is an ‘*et et*’—, the objective recognition of the Church (the Pope’s letter is an expression of this objective recognition).

It is because of an experienced correspondence with the heart that we are bound to the event of Christ. We would not be here if something had not touched us so deeply in our humanity that we said, like St Peter, in those moments when our measure was exceeded by a greater measure: “We do not understand what you say either, but if we go away from you, where will we go? You alone have the words that explain life.” Appealing to the heart—as we have always said—does not mean asserting our own measure, but the experience that motivates our trust, our openness to follow.

Giussani, in the unpublished article that has just been published in full on the *english.clonline* website, says: “The unity of believers is the contingent, even banal face of this divine presence. And just as back then, those who followed Him became Christians and changed, so today a Christian is a person who changes, changes as a person, and follows this unity to which Christ gave a sign of absolute objectivity, which is the bishop of Rome, the head of the community in Rome, because everything, everything converges here”; and a little later he speaks of “the magisterium, which is an objective reality, infallible, because the final word is not my interpretation. The final word is outside of me, and this is a value intrinsic to Christianity. The ultimate value, the truth, is a reality outside myself” (‘Christianity as an Event Today’ talk by Luigi Giussani organized by the Charles Péguy Association and the San Carlo Cultural Centre. Milan, October 28, 1992, pp. 5, 8, *english.clonline*).

The matter of the heart goes hand in hand with objectivity precisely because it is an “*et et*”, whereby the heart is truly enhanced in the encounter with the face and word of Christ who reaches you now, who shows you the way now. So much for stifling freedom!

On this, I again quote Giussani: “I wanted to humbly and fraternally ask you to be faithful in following the movement; in everything, if possible. We will never regret this obedience, all the more so in contingent things, or in those things that are more easily debatable, where opinions can more easily diverge. Keeping ourselves in following the unity of the companionship always, sooner or later, brings to the fore the truth that was in your opinion, and that is recognised. Be that as it may, the insistence on following the directives of the movement, in all areas and at all levels, leaves intact what we emphasized yesterday—if God leaves it intact!—leaves your freedom intact” (*La verità nasce dalla carne* [The Truth is Born of the Flesh], op. cit., pp. 78-79).

Cassese. To conclude, we were struck by the fact that in the letter the Pope recommends you and all adherents to take care of unity and encourages you and your co-workers. In these words we too feel called; we too feel and wish to exercise this responsibility. How are we revived in our responsibility?

Prosperi. Your observation is correct: every time he refers to me, he adds a reference to you. When you are called, you are also made responsible. It is a responsibility—mine, yours and that of all our friends in the movement—towards the whole Church.

This question gives me the opportunity to emphasize a final recommendation in the Pope’s words and a point of conscience that must increasingly mature in our experience. I refer to the question of communal leadership.

What does communal leadership mean? In our DNA, unity is possible, as we said, within the following of authority, which for us has always been personal guidance: one person leads, you follow one person. What does this have to do with communal leadership? In other words, what does it mean that a guide is personal and communal at the same time? How does one not undermine the

other? If there is one person who leads, ultimately you follow one person. We have said this many times. The matter is whether this one person is an expression of self or an expression of communion. If we look at the path we have taken this year, all the most significant steps, right up to the focus on the contents of the Fraternity Exercises, the summer vacations, the International Assembly of Leaders and the Beginning Day, have been the fruit of the judgement on the experience lived by our companionship, that is, by our communion. Because leadership itself must reflect communion as a point to follow. The expression of authority is either ‘dialogued’ or it is authoritarian. This has been true since the beginning of the Church: Jesus himself inaugurated this method.

In this regard, allow me to quote further from Giussani’s recent unpublished article: “But this identity was already visible in the times of Christ Himself. Since He could not go everywhere Himself, He sent His men, two by two, into the villages that asked for Him, and they returned enthusiastic, saying: “Master, what You do, we have also done; the miracles You perform, we have also performed. The people listen to us, too” (cf. *Mk* 6:7–13). The same phenomenon that happened where He went happened in the villages where the pairs of men went. In the village where the two men went, how was Christ present? Through those two men He had sent. The method Christ used to continue His presence among us, His method, was already used when He was alive. Through the presence of those who believe in Him, He is present, in the literal sense of the term. Therefore, Christianity as event is God made man and present in history within (to express myself clearly) the unity of those who believe in Him” (‘Christianity as an Event Today’, op. cit., p. 4, *english.clonline*).

How can I be sure that by following this guided companionship I am in the right? One characteristic of communion leadership—I have already mentioned this—in a church reality is to be recognized objectively, not just subjectively. There is my recognition, through verification in my experience, and there is the objective recognition of the Church. For this we know that the journey is true.

I want to conclude by reflecting on the opening passage of the letter. I have not wished to avoid going into the details of the passages, responding to the many just concerns that have emerged, which are a sign that we want to understand, that we want to be ever more certain and joyful in the path we are taking, also because of the task that is entrusted to us. The opening passage is the first reason for gratitude, at least as I have experienced it: “I am grateful to the Lord for the vitality that the movement continually demonstrates in its work of evangelisation and charity towards the men and women of today.” He is telling us to be grateful to the Lord because the movement continues to be itself, indeed it is always more so; in fact the work of evangelisation (mission) and charity are an expression of the dimensions of Christian experience as Giussani described them (culture, charity, mission).

The Pope calls us to unity not only because of internal problems within the movement, but as a value for the whole Church, advising that we become aware of the great task we have for the whole Church and for the world. This is a great thing. Only by broadening our horizon in this way will we be able to overcome personalisms and heal the wounds that sometimes still afflict relationships in our communities. The impetus of the mission, of the gift of ourselves in response to the call we have received, helps us to empathize with Father Giussani’s “full” and overflowing heart when he climbed the steps of the Berchet, beginning the great adventure of which we are part and for which we are here tonight.

I hope I have contributed a little to clarifying the content and value of the Pope’s letter. I therefore ask you—we are all responsible here, which is why I dared convene you—to use it to help our friends in the step that all our communities are called to take.

Cassese. Let us say a prayer.

Gloria
Veni Sancte Spiritus