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THE DIVINE IN THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION TO SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY

Fr. Jose` Medina – January 3rd 2018

I wanted to take this occasion to introduce the work of School of Community that we are going to do for the next five months and to highlight the key issues, some of the key questions that Father Julián Carrón has highlighted during the Beginning Day.

The Beginning Day is that moment in the year when the work of School of Community is introduced by doing two things: reflecting on where we have arrived—usually that’s what Davide Prospero does—and what questions we have. What have we learned up to this point? What questions do we have for now? How, as a community, are we actually growing in awareness? We grow in the awareness of what we are, who we are, who we belong to, by engaging on multiple levels; through the work of the School of Community, through the events and things that happen to us, etc. Where have we arrived? The question can be summarized in the last contribution that Davide Prospero gave, the last thing that he says: *“Life becomes useful when it becomes obedience, Ultimately, it is an openness to the presence of Christ; a yielding to the greatness that Another wants to achieve in you and for you, for the world, in a way that is perhaps different from how you would have it. We live so that Christ may be acknowledged everywhere. We live for the human glory of Christ.”*

Davide asks this question to Fr. Carrón, *“How can we help each other to live the awareness of this dependence?”* This is the question that should frame all of our work during these next few months. How are we helped to live the awareness of our dependence? The word dependence, to depend, is of the utmost importance.

Fr. Carron, in the Beginning Day, delved into what this dependence looks like. One of the ways that I summarized it—that was useful to me—is that we have *“reduced or passed from an enthusiasm for a presence to a position that is defined by cultural translation”*. We no longer depend on a relationship with Another, but we depend as if belonging to a club.

I think that this is the key provocation: “if we don’t live everything that is given to us as a cry that reminds us of the memory of Christ, nothing we do will be able to satisfy and give us the gladness we desire and the event that shook us will deteriorate into things to do.” Fr. Carrón later says, “This was our objection to the situation of the Church in modern times: the way of conceiving of morality was not born of the event of Christ. It was practically ‘devitalized,’ as when you remove the nerve from a tooth.”

During the Disarming Beauty tour, Fr. Carrón commented: “When we got married, out of love for another, we washed the dishes and cleaned the room; but as time passes by, we started doing these things because ‘that’s what you do since you are married.’ But we didn’t get married to wash dishes or care for a house or live with another person.” We have lost this sense of our ontological dependence on Another. We live as if depending were more of an obstacle than the fulfilment of our person and when we talk about depending, belonging to Another, we mostly speak of doing certain things as paying our dues and not as relationship with the other. This is the heart of what Fr. Julian is calling us to re-consider.

In the second part of the Beginning Day, Fr. Carrón speaks about how we can avoid everything crystallizing into devitalized doctrine, everything being without life, like a tooth without a nerve. How can we rediscover the beginning, live our lives with the event as the point of departure?

He says, “the event can be the point of departure if it is happening now, if it has an impact on my life, if it changes me, if it moves me.” If it is not happening now, then I live as if I already know everything and I act accordingly. He uses this sentence, “What is at stake is a question of conversion towards Christ.”

How can we help each other live the awareness of this dependence? How can we convert towards Christ and start from the event as the point of departure? Fr. Carrón says one thing, *“adhere to the history through which He has reached us.”* *“The journey forward requires adhering like children to the story of God in our life. The event of Christ endures throughout history, and makes itself visible today through our companionship “the place where this presence ‘exists’ and is more easily recognized and loved, where this presence forgives everything.”*

This adhering to the history is through the particular circumstances—you do School of Community, you participate to the things that our companionship indicates—but it’s not enough to just participate. He is inviting us to go deeper than a formal belonging and he insists that we actually live this verification of this dependence by looking at our experience, by *“using the symptoms, paying attention to what reality provokes in us.”* I would like to highlight that he speaks of what happens in us or what happens around us, but to what reality provokes in us, the symptoms that we sense in ourselves. *“The journey is simple,” as our friend writes. “I realize that the more I take seriously the working hypothesis that the movement proposes, the more I see things around me differently, more deeply, in a true way.”*

So, connect this to the question of the beginning. In order to help one another live the awareness of our ontological dependence—that there is Another who makes me, that life is for this Other who is the Mystery, who is God—I need to depend on the working hypothesis that is being given to me and test and see what happens when I follow. Fr. Carrón ends the Beginning Day by saying: *“I am curious to see what creativity will flow from the recovery of the beginning, if we accept Fr. Giussani’s invitation, and how we will respond to the need we find in our various spheres of activity.”*

The work of the next five months, as it was introduced to us during this time in the Beginning Day, is to delve and deepen our understanding of what depending means, not intellectually, but experientially, beyond the formalism which tends to be the way in which we belong to an association or a group.

The work of the School of Community is on Chapter 8 of Why the Church? In this chapter in particular, Fr. Giussani delves into this ‘divine in the Church.’ I’m going to propose, following Fr. Carrón’s invitation, to work on pages 163 to 179 for the next five to six weeks.

A brief note of method. I think that this chapter and the Beginning Day are absolutely critical for us, because there is nothing more counter-cultural in America than to depend. And therefore, we have a strong tendency to read the School of Community avoiding that which is not familiar to us. It’s easy for us to read the Beginning Day, the School of Community, highlighting those things that are familiar to our way of thinking. But what Fr. Carrón is asking us to do is to shift the way we think. *“It’s a question of a conversion towards Christ.”* To say, “my fulfillment is in my depending and the awareness of my depending” is foreign to us.

Therefore, it's critical that we read the School of Community looking for something that is profoundly human and unfamiliar at the same time, something that resonates with us and at the same time is foreign in our daily experience. Otherwise we risk to reduce the proposal of the school of community to the "already known." The words of Galatians 2:20, *"It is not I, but You that live in me,"* are a great provocation to the way we think of ourselves 99 percent of the time. We think of ourselves as 'in construction.' The School of Community and this chapter in particular, offer something that is unfamiliar and difficult to wrap our head around. Not because it is theological, but because it is foreign to our common daily experience, even though it resonates profoundly with our human experience.

What are the points that I would highlight of this chapter? I will send you the PDF with my notes so that you have them and you can use them in whatever way you choose to.

Fr. Giussani writes, *"The Church claims that the mysteries of our faith hold the ultimate meaning of my existence."* What we are reading during these next months, claims to be the ultimate meaning of my existence in very practical ways. He says, *"this is not an abstract formulation, but something pertinent to the root of every man's existence, explaining and clarifying his ultimate meaning."* He gives two examples: The Trinity, what does it say, what does it reveal of my existence, the mystery of the Trinity? *"He says that God is both one and in communion, that I cannot understand myself if not in relationship with Another. The relationship formula between the I and the You, between a man and a woman, between parents and their children, no analyses and power of reason can ever explain this paradoxical nature of the one and the many, which is man's experience."* He continues, *"I never say the word I so intensely, never perceive the unity of my own identity with the same passion as when I say You or when the same love with which he says You, I say we."* Think about how much of a provocation—I'm not going to comment on these things—this means to us. The fact that my fulfillment as a person exists only in the possibility of saying You to Another. Later on, he comments in the incarnation, *"the place in which is revealed to us that everything has value for eternity, that nothing falls into oblivion, that everything is unified."* As you will see, the dogmas—often perceived as theoretical and abstract contraptions—speak deeply of our human existence and its meaning.

Later on, Fr. Giussani speaks about how do I acquire this sense of existence? How do I arrive to understand the ultimate meaning of my existence? And he uses one expression, by *osmosis*—"that is by remaining within, by living within the ecclesial community. These truths penetrate the membrane of our consciousness day by day in an incalculable way, enabling us to attain that certainty and clarity of truth which we need to face life. Through fidelity to the ecclesial community, through the very life of the community, the message comes to pass." Then again, he is saying that for me to understand who I am, in order for me to understand and live the meaning of my existence, I need to be with, to belong. Often in our belonging, as we heard in the Beginning Day, our belonging often is formal or is of our own choosing; we choose when and how we belong, perverting freedom. Perverting it because of course it is my freedom that says yes to this belonging, but perverting it in the sense that we don't accept the challenge that is given to us, that in depending on giving yourself fully to another, you understand who you are. The life of a community, the life of the Church as a whole, the life of a person grows in awareness over time. This is the reason why Fr. Giussani will speak about how the dogma is the expression of the conscience of the Church—it's not an invention of the theologians— and about why we have a Beginning Day, and why we have the spiritual exercises. Why do we have beginning points? Stopping points? Because we are growing in our awareness. Why, as a community, do we also have this sense of, have we grown in our awareness?

The third point, a very interesting one, is authority. *"In the life of the Church, about the communication of the truth, authority is like a channel, like a river bed with a twofold function. The first is an ideal function whereby the*

Church indicates the direction of the river. In the second, the Church delimits, like a river bank; it must judge when a statement or a method goes against or beyond the flow.” This is critical because authority, meaning the relationship between freedom and dependence, plays an important role in our lives. Who is authority for us? What does it mean to follow an authority? The first authority that we have in our companionship is Fr. Carrón. How is what he says helping us grow in our faith and what do we do when we don’t understand? It’s interesting because Giussani says in this section, “*a second way for the truth to be communicated in the Church is through the teaching of the Extraordinary Magisterium,*” through an authority that we follow. And it is with that authority that we can grow. So, the dependence that we are speaking about is very concrete, is very invasive because we see authority and freedom as against each other.

The final point that I would like to highlight is what I mentioned just briefly. The Church is a life, as *Why the Church?* Stated at the very beginning. “*It is so easy to miss this point. It is the life of one, the mystery of the person in Christ, that delves through time within the living organic nature of His people.*” It is through life that we grow in the awareness and familiarity with the Mystery, with the One that we love. Think about the sentence of the Beginning Day, “*if we do not live everything that is given to us as a cry that reminds us of the memory of Christ, nothing we do will be able to satisfy.*” And therefore, as we live life, this memory of Christ, this familiarity with him grows overtime. This familiarity grows in the form of awareness and it is as personal as it is communal. Every time that we get together as assembly - the assembly is a point of awareness. It’s not people asking or saying things one-on-one where other people can hear you, but it’s truly the work of a communion desirous of understanding more.

To facilitate the work of School of Community during these next five months, we’ve chosen a few pages of the book *The Life of Luigi Giussani* that mirror some of these issues and questions we will tackle to accompany the reading of *Why the Church?* not as something to also read for School of Community, but as something that can actually give more color to it because some of the statements are so powerful and so deep and we are so unfamiliar with them, that maybe hearing some of the stories can help us understand better.

I also want to share a proposal with all of you. I was struck by how, at the end of the Beginning Day, Fr Carrón insisted on two things: silence and singing. Those comments invite me to conversion. With regards to silence, I would propose to say evening prayer at the end of the day before leaving work, and to read the School of Community at that moment; it takes a total of fifteen minutes every day. It’s a very concrete proposal. The proposal itself is also an invitation to all of you to verify whether depending is useful or not. So, in itself the proposal is not only to help you understand better the text, but it is essential for you to actually grasp a glimpse of what is said on those pages. Otherwise, we can talk about how we learn the meaning of existence by osmosis, but if we don’t feel the osmosis it is more difficult. So, I would propose that before you leave work or before you take a break during the day, you do your evening prayer and you read your School of Community.

The second proposal regards singing. I propose that we begin the School of Community singing one or two songs. I hope that this summary helps you identify what songs are worth singing. If singing is absolutely impossible because of the makeup of the school, then start with evening prayer, that is, start the work of School of Community with an invitation to communion through singing and if

singing is not possible, with evening prayer. I also encourage you to join the choir. If you have the time, join the choir.

To understand what it means to follow, to depend in a particular history, to me means that indications that we are given during our regular life—like for example the end of a Beginning Day—are meaningful, are an invitation to a personal conversion. Now, we all have our lives and maybe we cannot all join the choir, so we'll sing during School of Community. Or maybe this conversion to a greater familiarity with Christ, this attempt to understand better what it means to depend, you will see it in different way. But to depend, to follow, requires naturally for me the desire to move. Without this dimension, we will never know what *depending* means, and therefore we will never know what *the meaning of our existence* is. We will be able to actually have examples, intellectual one, but not the ones that actually will carry you through the difficult moments of life.

To conclude, I read again the provocation that Davide Proserpi gave to open the Beginning Day: *"life becomes useful when it becomes obedience."* We all have to deal with this question. When in five weeks or six weeks we get together for an assembly, we have to deal with this question. Is it true or not? We have to verify whether this is true or not. *"Life becomes useful when it becomes obedience. Ultimately it is an openness to the presence of Christ, as yielding to the greatness that Another wants to achieve in you. A yielding to the greatness that Another wants to achieve in you and for you, for the world, in a way that is perhaps different from how you would have it."* Therefore, the question is, *how can we help each other to live the awareness of this dependence.?*

Beginning Day Summary

Life becomes useful when it becomes obedience: ultimately it is an openness to the presence of Christ, a yielding to the greatness that Another wants to achieve in you and for you, for the world, in a way that is perhaps different from how you would have it. We live so that Christ may be acknowledged everywhere. We live for the human glory of Christ. How can we help each other to live the awareness of this dependence?

From the enthusiasm for a presence to a position defined by a “cultural translation”

If we do not live everything that is given to us as a cry that reminds us of the memory of Christ, nothing we do will be able to satisfy us and give us the gladness we desire, and the event that shook us will deteriorate into “things to do,” but we are not moved by enthusiasm for the presence of Christ¹, as in the beginning. “At the beginning [...] it was not so.”

When Christianity becomes a conception, a doctrine, a way of conceiving and dealing with life, Christianity too becomes ideology. This was our objection to the situation of the Church in modern times: the way of conceiving of morality was not born of the event of Christ. It was practically ‘devitalized,’ as when you remove the nerve from a tooth. “This change [from enthusiasm for a presence to a “cultural translation” as the motivation of life] is the reason why it has become so easy to identify our experience as an activist, organizational, or cultural commitment.”

How can we avoid everything crystallizing into devitalized doctrine?

For the event to become the point of departure², the event must be happening now. You understand it, you perceive its impact, because it changes, it moves, it is happening now, not because *I already know it and now I'll manage it with my intelligence or with my effort*. “It is a question of conversion towards Christ.”

Adhering to the history through which he reaches us – The journey forward requires adhering like children to the story of God in our life. The event of Christ endures throughout history, and makes itself visible today through our companionship “the place where this presence ‘exists’ and is more easily recognized and loved, where this presence forgives everything.”

Using the symptoms – paying attention to what reality provokes in us. The “symptoms” that we sense in ourselves. The journey is simple, as this friend writes: “I realize that the more I take seriously the working hypothesis that the Movement proposes, the more I see things around me differently, more deeply, in a truer way.”

I am curious to see what creativity will flow from this recovery of the beginning, if we accept Fr. Giussani’s invitation, and how we will respond to the need we find in our various spheres of activity.

¹ “What burned in us, and made us go against the stream of the dominant understanding of marriage in our culture, was the fire that came from Christ. This fire fueled such a beautiful married life that we felt we were unique in all the world, but today we are left with embers that risk becoming ashes. What we feel now is the weight of our daily life.” (Mirelle’s letter)

² “The point of departure of Christianity is an Event. The point of departure of the others is a certain impression of things,” which becomes preconception and develops into a discourse, that is, into an ideology.

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The church claims that the mysteries of our faith hold the ultimate meaning of "my" existence, not an abstract formulation but something pertinent to the root of every man's existence, explaining and clarifying his ultimate meaning.

The unity and Trinity of God

The "One and Triune God": God, Being, understood as a state of communion within its own mysterious substance. [...] the relationship formula between the "I" and the "you," between a man and a woman, between parents and their children.

No analysis by the power of reason alone can ever explain this paradoxical nature of the "one" and the "many," which is man's experience. Man, never says the word "I" so intensely, never perceives the unity of his own identity with the same passion as when he says "you" or when, with the same love with which he says "you," he says "we."

The incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Is the most enlightening of the hypotheses which give unity to human history. Unifying categories have always been sought in attempts to interpret the affair of history, because everything in us tends towards this unity. But the various elements of an experience, of an age, of an event remain painfully separated from us and often we force together facts impossible to unify. It is impossible for man on his own to arrive at even a notion of peace without forgetting (or reneging) something.

The incarnation, the Word made flesh, who died and rose again, fulfills what often surfaces in man's conscience as presentiment or prophecy. The Risen Christ acclaims that all things in history are redeemable, that nothing is lost in the vortex of events. [...] Everything has value for eternity, nothing falls into oblivion.

Conclusion

Announcing the Risen Christ means bearing witness to man placed within the sphere of a companionship so strong that there is no need to forget evil or contradiction: he redeems, transforms all things, with man's freely given consent. This transformation is an experience a person already begins to live in the present. In this way, life acquires an interior proportion with the eternal already transpiring in the present time.

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The Church communicates truth through a method best described as **osmotic pressure**³: it is by remaining within, by living within the ecclesial community that, almost by continuous osmosis, these truths penetrate the membrane of our consciousness, day by day, in an incalculable way, enabling us to attain that certainty and clarity of truth which we need to face life. Through fidelity to the ecclesial community, through the very life of the community, the message comes to pass. Traditionally, this method is called *ordinary magisterium*.

The one condition for this is that this community must be truly ecclesial, that is, united to the bishop who, in his turn, is in communion with the bishop of Rome, the Pope.

If the ordinary magisterium is the guarantee of the development of the community as a living thing, the greatest means of all for the communication of truth in the life of the Church is that life's continuity. This is called *tradition*, the conscience of the community living now, rich in the memory of its whole history.

The Christian community, insofar as it is Church, is like a person who, as he grows, becomes aware of the truth that God placed within and around him. Its memory is a fundamental element of its personality, as it is for every man; in the absence of memory, in contrast, a grave symptom of mental hardening, sclerosis, sets in.

Tradition is of decisive importance because it comes to us through the life of the community, the continuity of Christ in history, whatever it teaches now, cannot be in contrast with all that it taught a thousand years ago. [...] Alfred North Whitehead once said that a philosophy or ideology could only be coherent with its origins for a generation at most. Well, the Church, with its millenary history, dares to affirm that it has never contradicted itself and never will. Such a claim is a miracle by itself.

³ one of two liquids, mixable but separated by a membrane, is transferred, along with some particular properties, to the other side of the membrane through diffusion.

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A second way exists for the truths of the faith to be communicated in the Church, and this is when its teaching assumes an extraordinary position - when the Pope, that is, intends to state something with all the authority at his command (Ecumenical Council or the Pontiff ex-cathedra definition). The extraordinary magisterium represents the height of Christian conscience, it concerns something that is already part of the Church's life. The authority highlights it, defending and clarifying what has always been lived (at least implicitly). The expression the Church uses for these explications is dogma.

Authority

In the life of the Church, about the communication of the truth, authority is like a channel, like a river bed, with a twofold function. The first is an ideal function whereby the Church indicates the direction of the river towards its mouth. In the second, the Church delimits, like a river bank; it must judge when a statement or teaching goes against or beyond the flow, flooding the banks whose purpose is to keep the water coursing in the direction of the ideal.

Dogma of Assumption

It has been handed down to each generation ever since Our Lady was raised to heavenly glory in body and soul at the end of her earthly life. It was particularly significant to affirm this dogma when the value of life was being increasingly made to consist in success in the here and now. The Christian event proclaims the value of the body's existence in eternity and that the value of life - even of a totally unnoteworthy life - lies in living the moment as an aspect and in function of the love for everything. This is to say that the value of the moment does not lie in its immediate success but in the love for all things with which it is lived.

Dogma of the Immaculate Conception

The Church proposes that we look to Mary as one who lived her humanity fully, without the mark of our original ambiguity. We are invited to look, that is, to a woman whose life can be summed up in her own phrase - *fiat voluntas tua* - in accepting her mission.

Papal Infallibility

The proclamation of this dogma occurred in a society where a rationalistic concept of life had become the dominant one in people's minds, and within this milieu, the Church opted to make a provocative, solemn affirmation: that man is not the only measure of reality, that the bond between man and truth does not just span the short bridge of his reason.

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In order to understand the Christian fact, we must constantly refer to life. It is not true at all that the word "dogma" has the dictatorial meaning many commentators attribute to it. Rather, it merely indicates the definitive formulation of a consciousness of the truth of which the Church is custodian.

This is analogous to the most common of life's experiences. The Church, in fact, is a life, and it is so easy to miss this point. It is the life of One, the mystery of the Person in Christ that develops through time within the living organic nature of His People. The Church, then, is a life which becomes increasingly conscious of self as time goes by.

It is probably useful to repeat this here: this failure to consider the Church as a living organism - therefore liable to grow in self-awareness and to correct and modify its awareness of the unchangeable deposit of the revealed faith - is the greatest source of misunderstanding in the way people judge and live the ecclesial community. In analyzing a person's life, we give due consideration to his background: to the conditions in which he grew up, his circumstances as an adult, and the contingency factors that might be incisive for his personality and cloud his consciousness. In the same way, we must remember that the Church lives and operates in the realms of time.

The Church is assisted by the indefatigable Spirit of Christ. However, this assistance does not spare the Church the fatigue and work of evolutive research for the precise reason that the Church's nature as a "body" that is certainly divine but also human is incarnated in time and space.

What do I have to do with the movement?

The Life of Luigi Giussani, pp. 476-479

The vacation took place at Campitello di Fassa, in September of 1975. Students from many different Italian universities participated, coming together to discuss the university situation. In reality, the aim of the meeting was quite different: “To address a discomfiture that everyone had noticed, but that had not been well identified, which prevented us from seeing possible solutions,” Grassi recalls.

On that occasion, on 6 September, Giussani provided a snapshot of the cl university situation as he had seen it evolving over the previous years: “I have seen among you many people who are full of good will, but who are ultimately exhausted. Exhausted to the point of clumsiness. [...] If we are blocked by exhaustion, it means that we are still immature in understanding the reason for our life and all we do.” He invited them all to recognize that “[t]he issue is not the community, is not the cl—it is ‘I.’” In reality, “[i]t is the vocation of my life that is at stake: an aware and stable identity.”

He described the method for attaining this stable identity: “Unity within yourself, and unity with others. We find unity inside ourselves by being united with Christ [...]. And unity with others is a consequence of this, a pure consequence of this. But unity with Christ is conditioned by the way in which this Presence makes itself perceptible, that is, by the body in which it reveals itself. That is to say, the life of the community, to the extent it makes the mystery of Christ real.” For this reason, friendship was the great vehicle to faith: “To follow the community is the method for growing the relationship with Christ, and therefore your own identity and unity with others.” This had two practical consequences, according to Giussani: first of all, “authoritativeness, which manifests in the exercise of authority;” and then, “the value of the community’s initiatives as such, that is, above all, the School of Community” (the ongoing catechesis of cl).

Giussani also established the three factors that defined the new way of facing reality generated by faith: first of all, “you start with an identity that is aware;” then, “you enter, you intervene in reality provoking a reaction. And this is called judgment and new practice.” In the end, “the method of judgment begins from my unity and, for this reason, the judgment creates and acts.” Therefore, Giussani concluded, in everything, “we need to save our belonging to the community.

For the intellectual, the main issue is interpretation, but for the wise it is to save their own belonging to the people.” Only this new identity “creates a new individual, active in the world. Not because of the initiatives you do, but because what you are: if you are, you bring together.”

During those months, Giussani felt compelled to point to a deviation the movement had made, as Cioni recalls: “Sure, we were a great group of kids, but we were an association of activists.” During a conversation, the young woman had used an image that Giussani adopted to describe the situation: “A great flowering with no roots.” Giussani intuited that the students were living reactively, not creatively: “He realized that this was draining us: he saw it in me, and he also gleaned it from the frequent meetings that he had with others. He could no longer see the original impetus, but just the organization of the community. But he let us go ahead with our things,” Cioni observes.

A few months went by, and the university students of the movement got together again in Novegro (in Milan) to kick off the beginning of the scholastic year on 30 October 1975. For Giussani this provided the opportunity to communicate to everyone the judgment he had given to the small group at Campitello: “When we started university there was a moment—or there were moments—when the misery, the desire, or even the passion for a new reality, for something new, drove us. Now we live in

the university without this appetite, the appetite for new life.” He pressed on, observing, “The new event is not our political, cultural, or social initiatives, our task forces, our seminarians and study groups, our alternative classes ... It is none of these, because even non-believers know how to do these.”

So where was the element of novelty? “That the people around us, in our departments, in our classes, no longer see just, as they do now, that we belong to Communion and Liberation—that is, a string of initiatives, meetings, tools to use. But that they become aware of the event of Communion and Liberation in me and between us. They become aware of this transformation that I become. They become aware of this unity that they can rage against, but which they must ultimately view with a feeling of nostalgia: the rock against which the power of hell, Christ would tell Peter, can never prevail.” Otherwise, “Communion and Liberation truly becomes just a political party and nothing more. It becomes an association, lively with initiatives, but wearying, because it is hard to love it longer than a set number of months.”

Giussani’s words were strong, but he underscored that he was not condemning anyone; he only wanted to call them back to facts that had happened: “The hard, incessant, heavy struggle forced upon us by the times has blown away our self-awareness.” The dispersion into myriad public activities had a painful symptom: “Your communities have shown a boundless lack of a capacity for mission. [...] If, through your friendship, you are not proposing the thing that makes you free, it means, first, that you don’t take it to heart, and, second, that you are nobody’s friends, because friendship is giving what makes the other free. Every single one of your companions—that you study with in class, that are in your department, that are in the university—should always be able to find, through the friendship that sparks between you, the bond that comes from a face that looks on him differently, should be able to see something—the announcement we carry.”

The three emergencies of the new creature

The Life of Luigi Giussani, pp.1030-1031

Giussani focused again on the newness that the Incarnation had introduced into the life of humankind in two reflections he gave in early 1999. He dedicated particular attention to the topic of the new creature, continuing the commentary he had begun the previous November and December. In his first talk on 31 January, addressed to Memores Domini novices, Giussani wished to describe how Christians experience “a new thought, a new affection, a new way of loving, a new way of building, a new way of doing everything, everything!” He listed three “emergencies” that, in his view, spanned the entire horizon of human life, and which demonstrated the profound change Christ effected in a person’s existence. First of all, justice: “They gave me a quote from Nietzsche, from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: ‘I do not like your cold justice; out of the eye of your judges there always glanceth the executioner and his cold steel. Tell me: where find we justice, which is love with seeing eyes? Devise me, then, the love which not only beareth all punishment, but also all guilt!’”

According to Giussani, the philosopher’s astute observation that justice must be love was not enough. “When justice is love it must entail charity, and this applies to everyone. Because the law of the State cannot take the place of, or cover the entire relationship that society and the individual that represents it (the judge) can have with the accused.” Otherwise there would be no way to explain something Pope John Paul II had just done, which Giussani used as an example: during a recent visit to the United States in January 1999, the pope had asked the governor of Missouri to spare the life of the condemned prisoner Darrell Mease. In response, the governor had granted a pardon to the fifty-two year-old, who had confessed to triple homicide.

Evidence of the new creature also emerged in the relationship between men and women. This relationship, when “perceived through instinct (instinct with original sin hidden inside) can only become insularity, closed-ness. That is why we have always said that love is above all (above everything, above everything) the sense of the other’s destiny.” If people did not want to reduce the relationship to a purely instinctive, animalistic level, “this absolute gratuitousness is essential to the love between men and women,” and whoever did not embrace it eventually became violent because this “makes subjects life more to domination and subjugated by the empire of power.”

The third emergency Giussani saw was work: “Work is the moment when love for Christ becomes more concrete and more powerful, but more toilsome.” When Jesus said, “My Father is always working. My Father is the eternal worker,” he meant that work was “the essence of Being, [...] the activity of the Mystery. The Father generates the Son and from them proceeds the Holy Spirit: it is a mystery the dynamic of which is called work. [...] The life of the Trinity is work, just as the action of a mother forming her child [in her womb] is work.”

On 21 February 1999, speaking to the Memores Domini in Salsomaggiore Terme in the Parma province, Giussani continued his reflection on the new man brought about through baptism: “The new man is like a graft onto an old trunk. [...] It requires a change.” Change was difficult and arduous because of “the fact that what is new is grafted onto what is old. There has to be a new creation, because the fact that a child be reborn in the heart of an old man means that a lot of rubbish has to be got rid of, and a lot of what covers this old man has to be put away: it is the heart that is created once again.” This transition, “the passage from the old to the new, the grafting of the new onto the old trunk, penetration into the trunk happens gradually.”

“You cannot unload the road to sanctity upon a structure”

The Life of Luigi Giussani, pp.312-313

These are concerns that Giussani extended also to those young people who, after having finished their schooling, began to work, marry, and start families. The concerns about the method and nature of the Christian experience, as it was born and developed in us, mattered to them as well. At the centre of Christian experience is the person, and he or she may not unload upon any structure or organization his or her certainty.

Apropos of such concern, Giussani told a story about something that had happened in the sixties. He did so in order to warn future generations, so that they might not make the same mistakes regarding the method: “When the first adults, the first young adults began to get married [...] they said, ‘We need to create communion, a community. So, in order to live communion, we will all get married together, at the same time of the year, get a huge building, a massive house, and go live all together.’” Giussani recalled that those young couples went to see him one evening to tell him about their idea.

They had already found and bought a house in the Turro neighborhood [of Milan] and I told them, “I completely disagree. It is not by means of unloading yourselves onto a logistical form that you will actualize communion among you, make the creation of a community among you easier. It is like what happens with a young man and woman for whom, before they are married, all is radiant and captivating. But once they get married, they begin to see the other’s warts. That is, each of them begins to become aware of the limits of the other, initially the physical ones, then those regarding affection, and finally the spiritual ones. Then the real work begins, where faith, hope, and charity must compensate for the diminishment or lack of appeal. So, if you put yourselves in a situation where you are on top of each other, all of your limits will reveal themselves, and you will start to fight with each other, one family against the other.” And that is exactly what happened. They started with twenty families. After a year they started to diminish, to try to leave.

Giussani did not deny that in those families there was “the will for an ideal, abstractly and sentimentally correct,” but he emphasized that there was also “a method to seek the realization of that ideal that was incorrect. They sought to unload upon a structure the answer to a moral or spiritual need.”

Many years later Giussani would alert the university students of the movement to the risk of “unloading” themselves, and he would do so by referring to the attitude that led to the situation in Turro: “I do not belong to the companionship of my friends as a brick does to a wall. What distinguishes me? Proximity?”

For Giussani the incident revealed an essential element of Christian life: “Belonging to a friendship does not mean proximity either. Proximity is human: common interests, shared financial interests, et cetera. Belonging is the awareness that my origin and your origin, my destiny and your destiny are the same: we are one thing. Everything else may divide us—time, space, work, my woman, vocation; everything else might be separated, but this origin and this destiny are common.” Indeed, he highlighted the origin of the only foundation of unity: “Awareness of what one is, of what you are, and of what I am.”

There was general disorientation

The Life of Luigi Giussani, 400-402

What terms can be used to describe what happened? In Giussani's own evaluation he highlighted light and shadow, identifying two factors.

The first was positive: "When the protest phenomenon broke out at the student level we were struck, first of all, by its basic demand for authenticity in things, in the general sense. The first factor that struck us was this basic demand for a greater authenticity in life, in public life. [...] And human restlessness is always prompted by a need for authenticity, since uneasiness and imbalance are always generated by falsehood, which is embedded somehow in the attitude being lived."

Pope Paul VI used similar words during a general audience on 25 September 1968:

Is it not perhaps true that young people today are passionate about truth, about sincerity, about "authenticity" (as they say today); and is not this an attribute of superiority? In their restlessness is there not, perhaps, a rebellion against the conventional hypocrisies that so often pervaded the society of yesterday? And underneath the reaction, which so many people find inexplicable, in which young people rage against affluence, against the bureaucratic and technological order, against a society lacking in higher and truly human ideals, is there not, perhaps, an impatience with mental, moral, and spiritual mediocrity, with emotional, artistic, and religious inadequacies, and with the impersonal conformism that marks our environment built by modern civilization?

Giussani also pointed to a second, more problematic, factor in the attitude of the protesters: "The idea of affirming authenticity instead of the ambiguity, the deception, the mask we lived by was presented, both fundamentally and universally, as requiring a subversion of the past, enmity towards the past, hostility towards the past, rejection of the past, or at least—but it's the same thing—forgetfulness and disregard for it."

In his opinion such an attitude was simplistic and, in the final analysis naive. "It is the fundamental naïveté of Adam, when he believed that by eating the forbidden fruit he could have full awareness of good and evil. In short, it is the naïveté of making myself 'the measure of all things,' the naïveté of the man who says, 'Here I come to set everything straight.'"

This naïveté weakened what was initially a genuine call for authenticity, diminishing its potential and condemning it to be reduced to the various projects for social change that would become typical of many people within the movement. In Giussani's words, "What sadness we felt, immediately, when faced with the will to change society. Among us, at least (that is, those who did not immediately share the view), many felt it."

In light of these factors, how did the movement take the blow? It witnessed "the disorientation characteristic of someone who, while going along with their journey and living out a fundamental experience, is startled by events that call for a return, a translation, an interpretation, and a decision on a level they have not yet attained through experience. [...] It's like a city under siege, where everyone is preparing for war, for the defence, bolstering the balustrades, et cetera, and then the enemy shows up three days earlier than expected. Of course the whole city—except for those pockets where the ideas are extremely clear and mature, except for the best-prepared generals—plunges into panic." According to Giussani, "There was a disorientation. This is the word that most benevolently accounts for what happened: a general disorientation. The disorientation didn't happen only to a certain group, but to everyone."

In one respect, “this disorientation was powerfully overcome. Letting ourselves be taken and inspired by the correct aspects of the event.” On the other hand, “the disorientation stagnated.” How so? By effecting “a reduction, or a frustration of the historical importance of the Christian fact,” together with a “minimization [...] of the present weight of the Christian Fact.” This “inevitably brings with it an ultimate dualism as a presence in the world,” according to which Christianity is reduced to “the supernatural dimension that looms over the present but has no impact on the present, and can neither offer a judgment on the historical present [...] nor] help the present, except in a purely moralistic way, as the inspiration for action.” Moreover, Giussani observed, further unpacking the events of 1968, “there are the solidity and immediacy of worldly needs, which you face according to your instincts, your blood, your way of seeing things, your way of feeling, your analysis, your theory, and according to the violence of your practice.”

Giussani identified at least three effects this had on the attitude of most of the movement’s members: “‘An efficiency-based notion of Christian responsibility, with an emphasis on morality.’ No, not just an emphasis, a total reduction to moralism! What reason was there to still be Christian? Only that Christianity pushes you to act, pushes you to shoulder your responsibilities, and that’s it!” Giussani told the story of a former gs leader he ran into at the doors of Catholic: “I was teasing him a little bit [...]. I used to see him around at Catholic, and we always traded jabs, serious, but laughing.” But on that occasion the student did not laugh as he told Giussani, “‘Listen, I’m wondering why I should even still be Christian.’ ‘Sure,’ I replied, ‘if being Christian means doing what you’re doing! You learned to act this way from the others, but they are better at it than we are, so I don’t see why you shouldn’t just be one of them.’”

The second effect (and a more serious one in Giussani’s view) involved “the inability to [...] bring one’s Christian experience to the level of becoming a systematic and critical judgment, and, therefore, a suggestion for how to act. The Christian mission is blocked in its potential to impact the world, because an experience affects the world only to the extent that it achieves a cultural expression.”

The third consequence was “the theoretical and practical underestimation of the experience [...] of authority.” Giussani was categorical: “[U]nderstand that there is no such thing [...] as systematic thought and systematic action without becoming disciples of a teacher! Therefore, there are two options: either you recognize an authority that is given, offered to you, or you choose one yourself.

Either authority is a grace from your history, a grace from God within your history, or you choose your authority yourself. The names of the head honchos of the day [...] were being invoked in the same way that, before, people used to invoke the name of this or that priest to justify whatever they were doing.”

For those who allowed themselves to be drawn in, once the protest had opted for a militant approach, the pressure to follow the demand for authenticity obscured the uniqueness of the Christian fact. It was no longer the yardstick for judging reality. Instead, the frameworks for analysis came from the outside, supplied by the militant ideologies and sociologies of the day. The rejection of authority, likewise, produced nothing other than the heart and summit of secular thought: autonomy from any authoritative witness to the past. Where the only thing that matters is the future, the power of witness passes to the leader, that is, to the guide who leads and directs towards the achievement of the project of a better world.

“The time of the person has come”

The Life of Luigi Giussani, 487-490

Already in early 1975, speaking at the National Council of the movement, Giussani used these words to point out a difficult situation: “The trouble that I, personally, consider to be the greatest to face us in twenty years (much more than that of ’65 or the disaster of ’68, because we were children then) is the dualistic tendency that is, in my opinion, taking hold of the movement,” almost to the point that he felt “marginalized.” He confided: “The desire for [Christ’s] second coming becomes, little by little as time goes by, the desire to go my own way and leave you alone.” For many years after this, he would hammer insistently on this point: the question of becoming adults. He would ask if the movement would succeed in generating mature people, and not simply members of an association, saying that the latter did not interest him.

In January 1976, Giussani insisted on the fact that the movement was “[a] Happening, an Event to create, not an organization to think up. [...] It’s you who are at stake.” He stated radically, “The essence of the question does not imply that there need to be fifty of us, two are enough.” And in September 1976, addressing the cl leadership at a meeting in Collevaenza, he said that the critical issue was “the slow struggle with which an adult comes into being,” and he wondered what caused this. “The reason for this situation is an extremely serious deterioration of the method: all that’s left of the method is a cage of words and formulas. The genius, the creativity is missing. It’s like the method’s genius has dried up.” But going forward like this, he explained, without mincing words, that “the movement becomes a terrible thing. Instead of mobilizing life and converting it, it becomes a mountain of conditioning.” For Giussani, on the contrary, it should be about “identifying with an experience, with a reality, with a living person. [...] The rest is sentimentalism and intimism.”

Giussani had the chance to reiterate these concerns on 12 September 1976, when he spoke to the cl adults of Milan, who had gathered in the church of San Lorenzo for the beginning day: “We have been talking about the deterioration of the method. The method’s deterioration can be described this way: we, who had walked onto the church and social battlefield as the champions of Christianity- as experience, now favor intellectualism over experience. And, along with intellectualism, a frenetic activism. And this is extremely serious. All of us can now say: the movement is not my life, or more precisely, my life is not movement. The movement is a series of conditionings for my life. And my life, therefore, is not evoked by it.” Giussani’s words captured a situation that had become unsustainable in his view: “There is lots of action, lots of initiatives, but without looking for confirmation in our daily life. Meanwhile, daily life—with the humility it forces on us, with its inevitable suffering, and with its concrete and unavoidable responsibilities— would make us balanced, more concrete and less vague, and more effectively faithful.” Once again he offered not a reproach, but an earnest invitation to recover the movement. Giussani felt that this was something that had to happen within the individual persons. Indeed, he went on, Friendship with the University Students the Lord allows our errors and our sins as a strange way—but the most dramatically functional, the most pedagogically effective way—to deepen the meaning of our relationship with Him. We are so entrenched in our self-love that if we did not experience our limit, we would not say with sincerity “God you are everything” and “I am nothing.” But in reality these are life’s only truths. God is everything and the rest is nothing. Or more precisely, the rest is to the extent that it recognizes its relationship with God. If this experience of life does not grow within us, if we fail to change our

attitude somewhat and take note of the way we are walking, personally and collectively, the adult will not grow, and that associational character, which has nothing to do with a reality of life, will prevail.

Giussani dedicated the majority of the university spiritual exercises to this topic from 6 to 8 December 1976 in Riva del Garda. A few pages of notes collected by Laura Cioni survive from the event. Even in their brevity, they reveal all the weight of the lance thrust by Giussani. He began his talk on 7 December with the novelty that the meeting in Riccioni had introduced into the life of the movement: “The new accent with which we were called back this year should put each one of us directly on the line. Until that happens, we will feel a restless uneasiness, full of stifled disappointment or frustrated desire, which will make us apply this call in a way that is comfortable, almost to the point of suspending life and its responsibilities.” But instead, Giussani went on, the times called for a personal move: “When the grip of a hostile society closes around us to the point of threatening the vivacity of our expression, and when a cultural and social hegemony tends to pierce our heart, stirring our natural uncertainties, then the time of the person has come.”

But by “person” he did not mean a generic word or an abstract concept. In Giussani’s vocabulary, “the thing that presses on until the person is (until the human individual has strength in this situation, where everything is stripped from the trunk to make dead leaves) is self-awareness. A clear and loving perception of yourself, charged with the awareness of your own destiny, and, therefore, able to have true affection for yourself, freed from the instinctive obtuseness of self-love.”

Going ahead with his reasoning, Giussani described the law of self-awareness as it can be traced in the psychological experience of every person:

We recognize and love our own identity by recognizing and loving another. [...] The wellspring of the capacity for affection is when a person is recognized in such a way that they are welcomed and embraced. For a child, this presence is that of its mother, so much so that, if this is missing, the spring of affection remains dry. But, at a certain point, this natural sign is no longer enough, because the individual has evolved towards youth, which disrupts and shows characteristics of an absence of affection. In the confusion, disorientation, messiness, and pretention of youth comes the time of the Other—the true, permanent Other, of which we are made, with a presence that is inescapable and without a face, ineffable. Youth is the time of that You into which the heart sinks, helpless, as though into an abyss. It is the time of God.

In the life of a person who matures, “this is the Presence that must be recognized, welcomed, and loved. Otherwise, their identity disappears, and the expectancy of youth becomes, in the adult, an uncontrolled and violent demand.” The emergence of this awareness was precisely what made existence dramatic: “The dramatic quality of life lies in living and recognizing this mysterious and penetrating Presence.”

How did this recognition come about? “The phenomenon that allows a personality to express itself is initiative, and the initiative that marks the start of a true Christian identity is the desire for the Memory of Christ, the desire for an awareness of Him, for His presence. Unless we have the courage to say that the fundamental issue is to make the desire for His memory familiar, the awareness of His Presence will inevitably reach us as the claim of something abstract, that is added to, or which is superimposed on issues considered to be more pressing and concrete.” The result of adopting this latter viewpoint would be the betrayal of the nature of the movement.

This brought him back to the theme of the person and the person's conversion, a topic that Giussani freed from every subjectivist and individualist reduction. Change could never be achieved alone or by applying some automatic formula; it took time, and required following someone:

The desire for the memory of Christ develops as a story within us, growing not automatically, but (just as all our abilities grow) through following someone. And just as we cannot own the project of our maturation, so we cannot choose our teacher, but can only recognize one. The teacher we must follow has been given to us by the Lord; the Lord has placed them there along the road he has put us on, along the path we are walking. To choose the teacher ourselves would mean choosing someone convenient for us, choosing someone who corresponds to our tastes, to our desire to have someone go along with our designs. But following means identifying with the criteria of the master, with the master's values, with what they tell us—it's not binding ourselves to the person, since people in and of themselves are fleeting.

For Giussani, the topic of the teacher to follow—or authority, to put it another way—was crucial for a Christian educational journey that was faithful to Church tradition. Indeed, he concluded, “nested within this following, living within it, is the following of Christ. The reason for following amongst ourselves is not our attachment to a particular person, but rather the following of Christ. Our friendship must reach towards this apprenticeship, since the true friend is one who, with discretion and respect, helps the other towards his destiny.”

The following day, 8 December, Giussani outlined the nature of the Christian community in which a person lives. And, in light of a concern that had driven him since the days of Student Youth, he emphasized that the term “community” should be stripped of every associational reduction:

Community in its contingent aspect, in the part that impacts you, is not the intermediary between you and the Lord, because the relationship Christ has established with you is constitutive of your person. Rather, the community is the total measure of your person, what you are deep down and always have within you, which defines you in your gaze and your actions. To feel everything as a function of the community—not as an organization, but as this new being, of which I am a part and which is a part of me, the fragile but real emergence of the mystery of new humanity that entered history with the Resurrection of Christ—only this erases individualism, because it goes into the depths of being rather than merely juxtaposing itself, as all ideologies do.