



IN THE COLLAPSE OF EVIDENCES, THE GENERATION OF A SUBJECT

Notes from Julián Carrón's talk concluding
the Spiritual Exercises of Priests at
Pacengo del Garda (Verona, Italy), November 5, 2014

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I woke up this morning with the urgent need to ask the Spirit to be upon all of us today, because only the Spirit can give us the openness and capacity to know what enables us to recognize how things really are. Without this awareness, it is not that we do not undertake initiatives or do them—because each of us moves anyway, out of a certain perception he has of things, out of an urgent need that he sees—but what we do fails to have an impact. For this reason, helping each other to have a true gaze on reality, on the circumstances we live, is the first gesture of friendship we can offer each other for living, for living our ministry, for living in front of the needs of the world.

A DIFFERENT PERCEPTION OF REALITY

The first gift Fr. Giussani gave us, through which he began to generate the history to which we all belong, was his perception of reality. Just think of his dialogue with the young men on the train, or with the high school students who came to him for confession, when he went to the parish on Lazio Avenue in Milan on the weekends in the early 1950s. Dialoguing and hearing confessions, he had a clear perception of what the situation was, and so he decided to change everything, even his own academic prospects, even though to some extent it disrupted what his superiors had in mind for him: he did so to respond to an urgent need that had appeared clearly to him. This was his point of departure. In a situation like that of the Ambrosian Church of the 1950s, in which there were no particular problems of orthodoxy and everything was transmitted peacefully, his gaze caught—by grace—a crucial issue, with a capacity of truly reading the signs of the times, those signs that almost nobody saw. What is evident to everyone now, because of the consequences we have seen and see, was only recognized by a few at the beginning, as always happens. Genius requires only a few clues to draw a general conclusion. This is the genius of the Spirit, who can give a person the grace to begin to understand. During his life, Fr. Giussani offered us many signs of this different gaze, different from that of the others and from ours as well, so much so that he surprised even us.

What was the problem in those years? The doctrine that was transmitted in an orthodox way no longer penetrated life; it did not become new experience. Fr. Giussani gave life to the Movement precisely to begin to respond to that urgent need. Therefore, he began anew by focusing on experience, because without it—that is, if the doctrine does not enter into life and one does not have an experience of it—we cannot understand the nature of the faith. From the beginning, he put experience at the center: “I’m not here

so that you can take my ideas as your own, but to teach you a true method that you can use to judge the things I will tell you.” (*The Risk of Education*, The Crossroads Publishing Company, New York, 2001, p. 11). In other words, I have not come to convince you about something, but to give you the instrument so you can experience it and convince yourselves, so that your personality is generated through the constant comparison between what you live and the criteria that you discover within yourselves, engaging yourselves in the verification of the proposal you receive.

**A WEAKNESS OF CONSCIOUSNESS,
AS IF THERE WERE NO REAL EVIDENCE LEFT**

But at a certain point, many years after the Movement began, Fr. Giussani realized that, especially in the life of young people, something new was happening again that did not manifest itself—as many might think—in a sort of ethical inconsistency. This would be nothing. He understood that the weakness of the young people of the 1980s was not merely a matter of consistency, or only of moral fragility: “The difference [lies] in a greater weakness of awareness one has now, a weakness that is not ethical, but pertains to the energy of our awareness. [...] It is as if there were no longer any real evidence except trends, because trends are [an instrument] a project of the power.” (L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987 [The “I” Is Reborn in an Encounter]*, Bur, Milano 2010, pp. 181-182.)

This disappearance of evidence grew exponentially in the following years and continues to grow. Today we can understand even more clearly the importance of a passage from then-Cardinal Ratzinger that we quoted, speaking of Europe: “At the time of the Enlightenment [...] in the opposition of the confessions and in the pending crisis of the image of God, an attempt was made to keep the essential values of morality outside the contradictions and to seek for them an evidence that would render them independent of the many divisions and uncertainties of the different philosophies and confessions. In this way, they wanted to ensure the basis of coexistence and, in general, the foundations of humanity. At that time, it was thought to be possible, as the great deep convictions created by Christianity to a large extent remained and seemed undeniable. [...] The search for such a reassuring certainty, which could remain uncontested beyond all differences, failed.” (J. Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto e la crisi delle culture [The Europe of Benedict and the Crisis of Cultures]*, LEV-Cantagalli, Rome-Siena 2005, p. 61).

In fact, as then-Cardinal Ratzinger wrote in 1998, “The



collapse of ancient religious certainties, that seventy years ago still seemed standing, in the meantime has become an accomplished fact. Therefore there is a stronger and more generalized fear that this will inevitably lead to a collapse of the sense of humanity *tout court*” (*Fede, Verità, Tolleranza* [Faith, Truth, Tolerance], Cantagalli, Siena 2003, p. 147). Therefore, when we speak of a “collapse of evidence,” as we did on the occasion of the European elections, we are indicating something that profoundly characterizes our historical context. Giussani did not let himself be confused by consequences. In fact, this collapse causes a whole series of ethical and moral consequences, but what he clearly identified is the origin: there is no longer any real evidence. The fact that we find it difficult to realize this shows just how far we participate in this situation. In fact, at its origin there is a reduction of the human person, of our fundamental capacities, that leads us to no longer recognize the evidence. This reduction, says Giussani, is asserted through the influence of the powers that be. Their fundamental attack is against the “I;” it is a reduction of the “I,” of desire, of reason’s capacity to recognize reality. Perhaps we, too, are defined by the powers that be more than we think, and our difficulty in recognizing the type of collapse that characterizes our time is the first sign of this fact. Therefore, the powers that be can leave us to get distracted by other things because, deep down—since we do not grasp and strike the origin of everything, from whence come all the negative consequences we see—our activity does not constitute a problem.

In this regard, a friend reminded me of a line of Chesterton’s: “The sages, it is often said, can see no answer to the riddle of religion. But the trouble with our sages is not that

they cannot see the answer, it is that they cannot even see the riddle” (G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Chapter 3). In other words, they do not realize the problem, do not see the evidence, and so it is difficult for them to understand all the rest. And this, by the way, is not a problem of ecclesiastical alignments, of progressives or conservatives, but of a gaze on reality, and it regards everyone. For that matter, Jesus had the same problem with the Pharisees. Why did they insist so fiercely on ethics? Because they did not understand the nature of the problem and could consequently settle for an insistence on ethics. The Pelagianism we often find within depends on the fact that we do not realize the nature of the human problem. For this reason, we can hustle and bustle to activate many attempts at a solution, without in the least challenging the foundation of the issue. At times, Jesus appears naive to our eyes, and we are scandalized. When He says: “Look, deep down, this is not the problem,” He scandalizes everyone. “What? How is it possible that Jesus thinks it is more important to eat at Zacchaeus’ house than to give him a lesson on morality?” Jesus’ attitude blows everyone away. “But how is it possible?”

Jesus has a different perception of the question, a true perception. How long until we understand this? Something similar already happened to us. In fact, Fr. Giussani saw certain things from the very beginning, but it took a long time for it to become clear to us, too, and now to everyone. It is not a problem of alignments, of arguments or dialectics. Thinking the problem can be resolved with dialectics is already part of the inability to recognize the evidence, the “most evident” evidence—excuse the play on words. It is already part of the inability to grasp what >>>

» is happening, what the collapse in front of us is. If we do not realize this, we cannot hope to respond to the challenge adequately, even if we hustle and bustle about in a thousand ways.

A REDUCTION OF THE CAPACITY TO LOOK

What is reduced is a perception of the human condition as a whole, of the human as such. If we do not realize it, Fr. Giussani told us, it is because of the influence of the powers that be, the way they reduce our capacity to look at reality. This influence does not primarily reduce our ethical capacity, our capacity for consistency, but our capacity to look. The consequence is a reduced awareness of what happens. For this reason, I was very struck by the passage from Fr. Giussani that I quoted in the *Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity* (cf. J. Carrón, “*Press On To Make Him My Own*,” pp. 31-32): “If we are so shamefully divided [within ourselves], so fragmented that even unity between man and woman is impossible and we can trust no one, if we are so cynical towards everyone and everything and so out of love with ourselves [as if we were detached from ourselves], how can we extract something from this mire in order to reconstruct the battered walls of our person—the cement for building new walls? [...] Given this, our wounded situation, we cannot then say: ‘Let’s set ourselves to work to reconstruct humanity.’ If we are so defeated, how can we possibly win? [...] *Someone needs to come from outside*—can only come from outside [from outside our thoughts, outside our reduced capacity to look, our reduced capacity to see. Someone must come from outside for us now, not for us before we began living Christianity, not for those who still are not Christians, but for us who are already Christians]—who sees our battered dwelling place and re-builds the walls. [...] This is the major difficulty as far as [...] authentic Christianity is concerned: it is through *something other*—that comes from outside—that man becomes himself.” (L. Giussani, *By Grace, Always, in He is if He Changes, 30 Days* supplement, No. 7-8 1994, pp. 57-59).

This, Giussani insists, “is uninviting.” Pay attention: it is uninviting to us. We see a resistance in ourselves, because each of us claims he already has a clear idea of the situation. Just think of certain conversations among us: each person already has her own judgment on the situation, on what should be done. We already know, and we priests more than everyone! For this reason, we do not like that someone else must come from outside to rebuild our shattered walls. We do not like it “because [...] it welcomes something that does not correspond to our imagination or to our im-

age of experience, and it appears abstract in its claim. [Thus] [...] we come to a halt [we should write this line across our foreheads so we see it whenever we look in the mirror!] [...] in an impotent aspiring to find a remedy, *or, in a fraudulent, lie-filled claim*. In other words, *we identify the remedy in our own head* [whatever image each of us forms] *and according to our own desire to make good* [we form an image and entrust ourselves to our will to make good, thus moving forward with what we have in our own head] [...]. Thus is born the ‘discoursing’ on moral values, because discoursing on moral values suggests that the remedy to the dissolution lies in man’s power of imagination and will: ‘Let’s work together. Together we can fix it!’” (*ibid.* p. 32).

CHRIST CAME TO REAWAKEN OUR CAPACITY TO KNOW REALITY

If we do not help each other get past our own images and thoughts, if we do not stop doggedly insisting on achieving them with our own actions, we will not meet the current challenge. The situation that Fr. Giussani describes is the same one the Church has reminded us of throughout the course of her history: “The precepts of natural law [that is, the greatest evidence for the human person] are not perceived by everyone clearly and immediately [because of the reduction of our “I,” which we, too, experience]. In the present situation sinful man needs grace and revelation so moral and religious truths [that is, the evidences] may be known ‘by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error.’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1960). This is the situation: it was described by the First Vatican Council back in the 1800s, speaking of the knowledge of God, then it was discussed again

in the Catechism. Therefore, in a document on the same theme, the International Theological Commission declared: “We must therefore be modest and prudent when invoking the ‘obviousness’ of natural law precepts” (International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law*, 2009, n. 52). This condition worsened with the influence of secularization, and for this reason the condition of contemporary man is characterized precisely by the collapse of evidences.

Thus Fr. Giussani was not distracted when, to respond to this situation, he communicated Christianity to us, not to convince us of his ideas, but so that we could see anew reality as it is. He told us that Christ came precisely to reawaken the religious sense in us, to reawaken our capacity to know reality. If we do not realize this, we will end up plugging leaks, consequences, here and there, but without

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truly helping people to see. In fact, the situation has changed radically: it is not that people see the evidence and deny it because they are bad or close-minded; they really do not see it. This is part of the reduction of the human that we have constantly before us. If we can say we see, it is only because we are Christians, because the fact of Christ puts us in the condition to see. Otherwise we will think like everyone else. So there is no use scolding people because they cannot see—we can do it, but it is useless! We need to give others a real contribution, helping them to come out of this blocked situation and to see reality again.

I was struck by an observation by Cardinal Scola in an interview for the daily newspaper *la Repubblica* during the days of the Synod on the Family. I think it is very valuable, and so I re-propose it to you today. Speaking of the today in which the Church finds herself, he says, “The comparison between the sexual revolution [as the ultimate attempt of individuals to save themselves by themselves, according to all the images that each person can construct] is perhaps

no less of a challenge than that issued by the Marxist revolution” (A. Scola, “Il no ai divorziati resta, ma non è un castigo e sugli omosessuali la Chiesa è stata lenta,” [The no to divorced people remains, but it is not a punishment, and on homosexuals the Church was slow], interview by Paolo Rodari, *la Repubblica*, October 12, 2014, p. 19). They are two attempts, on the social or individualistic level, to save oneself by oneself.

In the face of this new challenge, which involves the Church and ourselves, we have in our history (I refer to the life of the Movement, throughout which Fr. Giussani accompanied us) the resource that enables us to face it. However, at times it seems to me that not having learned this history well enough, we repeat some errors of the past. And I am amazed that we have yet to grasp in all its density what we said in the first lesson of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, precisely in re-reading our history: how Fr. Giussani faced the challenge of the Marxist revolution of 1968 and how he judged our attempt to respond to it. Since we have not taken it to heart, we can repeat the same efforts and the same errors.

AN EXISTENTIAL INSECURITY THAT MAKES US SEEK OUR FOUNDATION IN THE THINGS WE DO

Fr. Giussani said that behind our attempts, all desirous of responding to the situation, there was “an efficientistic conception of Christian commitment, with accentuations of moralism.’ Not *accentuations*—with wholesale *reduction* to moralism! [because deep down we did not

understand what it was about] [...] Second consequence [...] [is] the incapacity to ‘culturalize’ the discourse, to bring one’s Christian experience to the level in which it becomes systematic and critical judgment, and thus a prompt for a modality of action. [...] Third consequence: the theoretical and practical underestimation of the authoritative experience, of authority” (L. Giussani, “The Long March to Maturity,” in *Traces-Litterae communionis*, Vol. 10, n. 3, March 2008, pp. 25-27).

Why did this happen, according to Fr. Giussani? Because of naivety, “the naivety of a man who says, ‘Get out of the way and let me set things right’ [...] What melancholy!” (*ibid.* p. 26, 23). What melancholy, truly, because, as we can note today as well, many of those attempts were born and are born “of an existential insecurity, that is, from a deep fear, that makes us seek our foundation in our own expressions. This observation, which we have already made once, is of prime importance. Those who are full of insecurity, or who are dominated by profound fear and existential anxiety,

seek security in things they do: culture and organization. [...] “It is an existential insecurity, a deep-rooted fear, that makes us view the things we do culturally and organizationally as our foundation, as the reason [...] of our [own] substance.” But the most terrible thing is what he observed next: all the things we do, “all the cultural activity and all the organizational activity do not become expression of a new physiognomy, of a new person,” because they are signs of our existential fear. In fact, Giussani continues, “if they were the expression of a new person, they could also not exist, when circumstances did not permit them, but that person would still stand. Instead, for many of our people present here today, if there

were not these things, they would not stand, they would not know what they are here for, they would not know what to belong to: they do not stand, they do not have substance, because the substance of my person is the presence of an Other” (L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)*, Bur, Milano 2008, pp. 96-97).

If we do not take this history to heart, even if we continue with our initiatives, our activism, hustling and bustling, we will never touch the ultimate origin of the question and, as Fr. Giussani reminds us, we will remain naive.

EXAMINING MORE DEEPLY THE NATURE OF THE SUBJECT WHO FACES THE PROBLEMS

Drawing upon the experience of the Gospel, he underlines that the person reduced by the powers that be, “rediscovers herself [only] in a living encounter, that is, in a >>>

What is the crucial point of our original contribution? What does Fr. Giussani identify as the mission of Christ? Christ did not come to solve the problems of the human person, but to educate to the religious sense, that is, to reawaken the “I.”

» presence she runs up against and that attracts her, in a presence” (L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro. 1986-1987*, op. cit., p. 182). If this does not happen, none of our attempts to respond to the new challenges, to this reduction that makes people settle for all the images they build of themselves, according to a modality that can be different from that of the preceding revolution, will bear fruit. If people do not rediscover themselves, they will only emerge further reduced by their efforts to resolve the problem. We already see just how much the attempts of our contemporaries fail to grasp the nature of the “I” and thus to respond to its ultimate needs.

What does Jesus do to reawaken women and men, to raise them up from this situation? He encounters them, puts before them a human presence that is not reduced—His own. Only the impact with Him, with His presence, with the clear awareness that He has of Himself, with His capacity to understand the density and expectation of the heart, can reawaken their humanity, their perception of the importance of their need, and consequently enable them not to waste time seeking solutions that cannot respond adequately. For this reason, Fr. Giussani insists that “the solution of the problems life sets before us every day ‘does not happen by directly facing the problems, but examining more deeply the nature of the subject who faces them.’” (in A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, Bur, Milano 2014, p. 489), that is, by exploring more deeply the nature of the “I,” the nature of one’s desire. He is not saying something commonplace, because only if the “I” becomes aware of itself to this level will it be able to free itself from all the presumed solutions and the idiocies it has in its head, as happens with us as well.

But at this point, we are in front of the same problem that Romano Guardini had already identified with great clarity: we can say that “it is Christ who reawakens our humanity,” but the question is, “Who protects Christ from me? Who keeps Him free from the cunning of my “I” [from a reduction I make] that tries to flee from true gift of self? And the response is: the Church” (R. Guardini in H.B. Gerl, *Romano Guardini. La vita e l’opera [His Life and Work]*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1988, p. 45), who reaches us in this era, particularly, through the charism. So then, if we do not realize who saves Christ and the charism from ourselves, we lose Christ and the charism along the road.

EACH PERSON’S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CHARISM

For this reason, we always do well to return to the famous talk by Fr. Giussani, *Il sacrificio più grande è dare la propria vita per l’opera di un Altro [The Greatest Sacrifice is to Give*

One’s Life for the Work of an Other] (in L. Giussani, *L’avvenimento cristiano [The Christian Event]*, Bur, Milano 2003, pp. 65-70). In it he gave us all the instruments for the journey. In this text he tells us that the charism was given to him by grace, but must pass to all of us, so that we may be pervaded by it. “Everyone bears responsibility for the charism he has encountered. Everyone is the cause of the decline or increase of the charism [...] It is a very serious matter for each one to become aware of this responsibility, as urgency, as loyalty and faithfulness. To obscure or diminish this responsibility means to obscure or diminish the intensity of the effect that the history of our charism has on the Church of God and on society.” But in the attempt to try to make it our own—and we cannot help but desire it—in “the personal version of the charism to which we have been called and to which we belong, “the more one becomes [truly] responsible, the more the charism passes through one’s temperament, through that vocation irreducible to any other, that is, one’s person.” Be-

cause of its historical concreteness, each person can make of the Movement what she or he wants: “reduce it, paralyze it, stress certain aspects at the expense of others, bend it to one’s own taste and advantage, or even abandon it out of negligence, or obstinacy, or superficiality.” (S. Alberto, L. Giussani, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World: New Traces of Christian Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010, pp. 83-84.)

Therefore, here is the great question: “Everyone [each of us], in his every action, every one of his days, in all his imaginings, in all his resolutions, in everything he does, must be con-

cerned with comparing his criteria with the charism, just as it emerged at the origins of our common history. [...] Methodologically, morally, and pedagogically this comparison [with the charism] must therefore be our greatest concern. Otherwise the charism becomes a pretext and a cue for what we want; it covers up and justifies what we want” (*ibid.* p. 84).

Precisely to limit this temptation he recognized in each of us, Fr. Giussani invited us to “make it our normal behaviour to compare ourselves with the charism as correction and as a continually re-awakened ideal. This comparison must become a habit, a virtue. This is our virtue: the comparison with the charism in its originality.” This was in 1991, and he added: “for now, this comparison is with the person with whom everything began [that is, he himself]. This person can be dissolved, but the texts left behind and the uninterrupted succession—if God wills—of the people indicated as the reference point, as true interpretation of what happened, become the instrument for correction and for reawakening; they become the instrument for morality. The line of refer-

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ences indicated is the most living thing in the present, because a text alone can be interpreted wrongly. It is difficult to interpret it wrongly, but it can happen. *Giving one's life for the work of an Other* always implies a link between the word "Other" and something historical, concrete, tangible, describable, photographable, with a name and a surname. Without this historical factor our pride imposes itself. This is certainly ephemeral, but in the worst sense of the word. [...] To speak of a charism without historicity is not to speak of a Catholic charism." (*ibid.*, pp. 84-85).

This comparison is crucial for us; otherwise we are left to ourselves. The same thing happens with Christ: who saves Christ from ourselves? Who saves the charism from ourselves? Because, when all is said and done, we can use the same words to make different soups; with the same Bible many Christian denominations can be formed, as we see.

What is at stake here is our capacity to stay in front of the new challenges with all the power of the charism that has been given to us. What is the crucial point of our original contribution? What does Fr. Giussani identify as the mission of Christ? Christ did not come to solve the problems of the human person, but to educate to the religious sense, that is, to reawaken the "I," putting it in the right position for facing them. "Jesus Christ did not come into the world as a substitute for human effort, human freedom, or to eliminate human trial—the existential condition of freedom. He came into the world to call man back to the depths of all questions, to his own fundamental structure, and to his own real situation. [...] It is not the task of Jesus to resolve all the various problems, but to harken man back to the position where he can more correctly try to resolve them. This toil is a rightful part of every individual's commitment, whose function in existing lies precisely in that search for solutions. (L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, pp. 97-98).

If the charism is unable to educate people capable of facing current challenges, there is no hope for us. Today, for ex-

ample, young people have to go all over the world, because in Italy they often cannot find an adequate job; if the charism is not able to raise up people capable of staying in front of this changed cultural context, we certainly cannot think of "putting doors on the countryside" as we say in Spain, to avoid the problem. We cannot put access passwords all over the place, on all the doors. The only hope is that subjects be generated who are able to face this situation precisely because of the experience of fullness that the charism enables them to live. If the Movement is not a present experience, confirmed by it, where I find confirmation of the truth of things, we will succumb. Fr. Braschi reminded us of this, speaking of the first Christians: how could they live in that way in the face of certain challenges? Only through the awareness of the grace they had received.

"NO ONE GENERATES UNLESS HE HAS BEEN GENERATED"

Therefore, in front of the collapse of evidences, the whole issue is whether subjects are generated that are able to have such an awareness of their own nature, of their own human need, that they do not let themselves be overwhelmed by reduced images and partial solutions that give no satisfaction. The Christian experience truly lived frees the "I" from all the partial attempts, makes it overflow with joy and fullness, setting before everyone a truly desirable humanity. In fact, what strikes people is not different opinions about things, but the impact with a true and full humanity. This different humanity is irresistible to people, no matter what latitude their home, as recounted by a young man who lived a few months in Texas. The people who had contact with him told him, "We have never seen a humanity like this." Today we see repeated the same reaction that the first people had to Jesus. Religious opinions are not what move people, but a true, full humanity. Later it will be necessary to give the reasons for this diversity, but the first repercussion is the encounter with a true humanity, not reduced.

What must we live in order to be able to educate a sub- ➤

» ject capable of facing reality? Let's return to the initial point: "No one generates, unless he himself was generated" (L. Giussani, "La gioia, la letizia e l'audacia. Nessuno genera, se non è generato" [Joy, gladness and audacity. No one generates, unless he himself was generated], *Litterae Communio-nis-Tracce*, n. 6/1997, p. IV), that is, unless one allows oneself to be generated now by the charism, by that history that constantly offers us all the instruments for making the journey. The grace of Fr. Giussani was in having no other concern than this generation of the subject, as if he had foreseen the situation we find ourselves living today more and more. All the others were concerned about other things, right ones, but they took for granted the subject that would have to face the problems. The one who gave his whole life for this generation of the "I," of which we are witnesses, was Fr. Giussani.

We will be faithful to the charism and the charism will be able to hold true in history if the Movement grows in its capacity to generate adults like him, so overflowing with the presence of Christ, so glad from their experience of Christ, that they can testify to everyone about who Christ is. There is no other road, Pope Francis always tells us, than the testimony of a life overflowing with His presence, so that anyone who meets us can participate in this fullness that was given to us by grace, but that we must always have the simplicity to accept, to receive, and without which we will lose the relationship with reality. For this reason, friends, let us help each other, support each other in this education.

The light that comes from our history, as we said at the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, is a contribution to return to the origin. Only in this way can we live in this historical context with a diversity of gaze and according to an original modality of presence in reality. As the Pope told us, without a foundation on something essential—and the essential is Christ—we will only be aghast in front of the new challenges. The essential, the return to the essential, to which Fr. Giussani always called us and to which now Pope Francis invites us, is crucial for us. Otherwise it will be difficult to be sufficiently free to seek new forms and ways of communicating the truth encountered, as the Pope wrote in the message to the Meeting.

GESTURES OF NEW HUMANITY THAT EVOKE INTEREST

Always returning to the essential, we will be able to set in front of everyone a presence, a new way of staying in reality. Through encountering this presence people can overcome the profound unease that prevents them from taking personal responsibility within circumstances. In order to face with responsibility the current challenges, something must happen that reawakens all of the "I" in such a way that it can

begin to look at things again with sufficient clarity and adhere to what it once again recognizes as evident. Without this we will not be able to respond, will not be able to give a real contribution to the current situation.

Our original contribution, that for which Fr. Giussani began everything, consists in rebuilding a subject able to recognize the truth, the evidence of things, and adhere to it. This is what makes the historical moment we are living in so exciting: the fact that when people see the evidence of something true in certain gestures, even in the midst of general indifference (which is a symptom of the reduction of the subject), they begin to become interested and are attracted. Do you remember how Fr. Giussani described an original presence? "A new reality is not built by speeches or organizational projects, but by living gestures of new humanity in the present" (*Dall'utopia alla presenza. 1975-1978*, Bur, Milano 2006, p. 66)—that is, gestures in which people can see and touch what makes them more themselves. When people discover this, they begin to change. Gestures of new humanity, that is, of friendship.

But a gaze that lives up to the human, a companionship that brings destiny only exists through the presence of Christ, because without the presence of Christ we cannot see or do anything. "Christ coincides with the experience I have of myself," a friend said recently. This overcomes the dualism: Christ coincides with the experience I have of myself, in my relationship with reality. And you see that Christ is present not just because I say

"Christ"—anyone can say this—but because I have a different experience of myself, as capacity to grasp reality and to be free, not defined by the context that surrounds me.

We are together for this. But we have to become even more aware of the nature of the challenge, if we want to give a real contribution to the present situation. Otherwise, we will try to plug the leaks, the circumstances, which for a certain time may even be useful, but this will not be what truly changes things. This means that we will need time. We begin to plant olive trees knowing that perhaps we will not see the fruit, except in certain moments, in certain people. Precisely for this reason it is even more crucial that we know how to identify well the purpose for which we are in the world. Fr. Giussani understood it very well, much earlier than others: Christ came to reawaken the human person, and His presence is documented by the fact that those who acknowledge Him relate differently with reality, live every circumstance that is given to them intensely. Only if we experience this can we communicate it to others, giving the reasons for our faith, and thus moving something in the reason of those we encounter. Otherwise, our contribution will be equal to zero. I

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