

“UBI FIDES, IBI LIBERTAS”

(SAINT AMBROSE)

BY JULIÁN CARRÓN

Notes from the Assembly of Responsibles of Communion and Liberation
Pacengo di Lazise (Verona), Italy, March 3, 2013

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1. A TRULY PROBLEMATIC ATTITUDE

How do the election results and the situation that we find ourselves living interrogate us? Beyond all of the possible analyses, what do they say to each one of us, and to us as a Christian community?

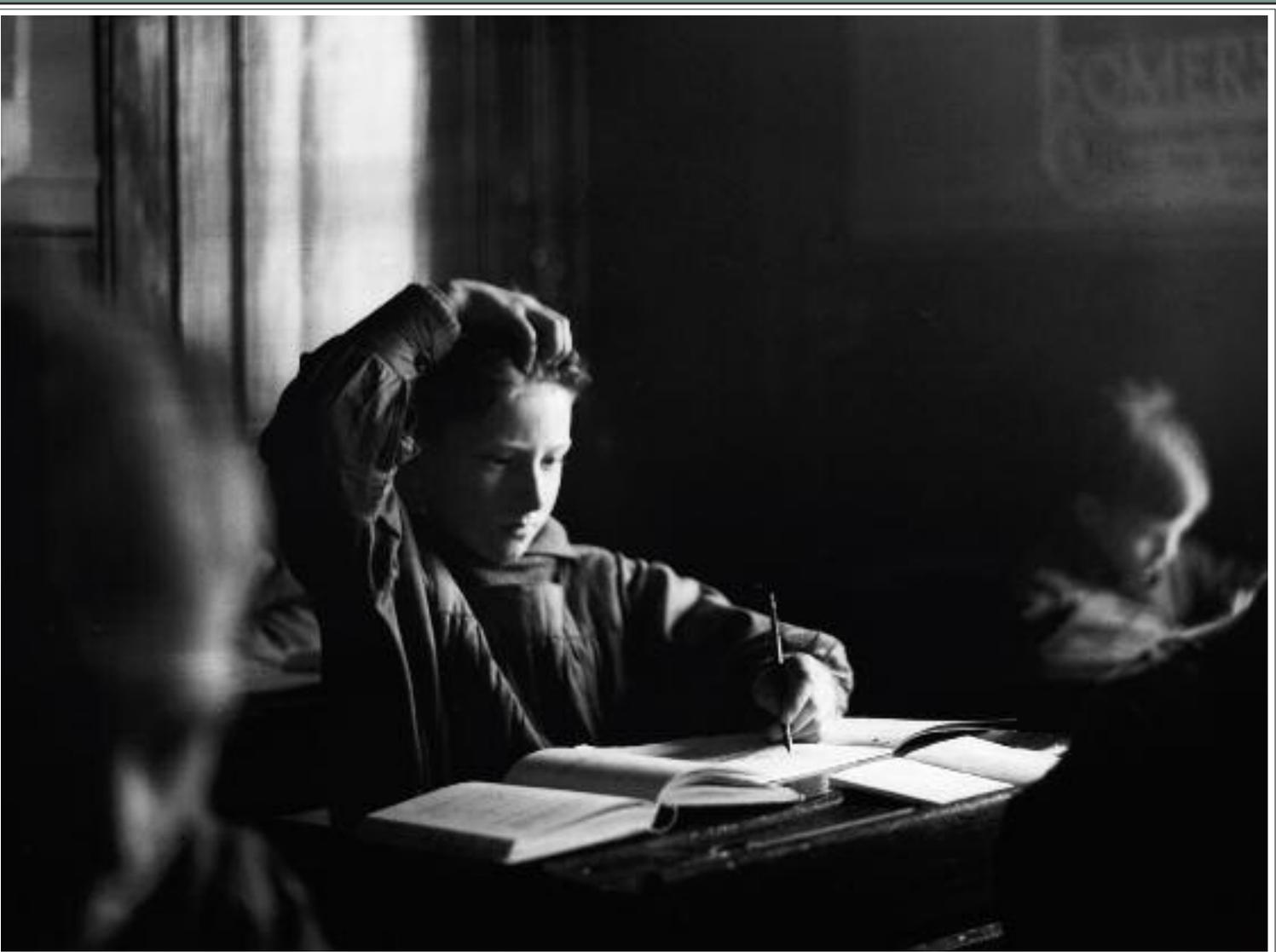
It seems to me that, even by just observing the results and without needing any particular genius, we can distinctly see a fragmentation and a general confusion: the ideologies that prevail are on one side, and many bewildered people are on the other. How do these facts interrogate us? What does it tell us that many people, with an impetus for change that is often confused and ambiguous, are searching for something different and vote accordingly? Only if we grasp the seriousness of the situation can we evaluate the reliability of proposals and attempts at a solution. Is it enough to get our piece of the pie? Change our rallying cry? Come up with a new instruction manual? In other words, is moralism able to substantially change the situation? I will leave the question open. Let's not assume that we've already understood it. I hope that we can continue to help each other to understand the nature of the challenge that we have before us by paying attention to all of the signs.

What is the origin of the situation in which we find ourselves? Fr. Giussani comes to our aid by showing us how it is rooted in something that began a long time ago. If we do not understand what the origin of the current fragmentation is, then we risk proposing solutions that are part of the problem, that exacerbate and complicate it, instead of offering a real alternative. Because of this, I will take the liberty of rereading some passages of Fr. Giussani that I believe to be significant—if one of you has a better interpretation, propose it and verify it. Giussani maintains that the confusion in which we find ourselves, and which is evident to all, derives from our modern attitude, from the fact that we participate in a human position that is not problematic: "Our attitude as modern men towards the religious fact is nonproblematic. In other words, it is not normally a truly problematic attitude" (L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, McGill-Queen's, 2001, p. 32). Now that we have a clear question—because of everything that has happened this year—we can better grasp, intercept, the answer that Fr. Giussani gives. Though it is well known to us, it is as if now we can understand it in all of its significance.

Without accepting the challenges that reality places in front of us, we cannot grasp the meaning of things and of life.

What does it mean that we don't have a truly problematic attitude? It means that we "already know," that we have no real need to understand, that we have already reduced the need, that we don't have the curiosity necessary for understanding. Sometimes—and this happened with regard to the election—the game is over before it begins: everyone already has an image, an explanation of everything that happens. Fr. Giussani says, "Life is a web of events and encounters which provoke the conscience, producing all different kinds of problems. But a problem is nothing other than the dynamic expression of a reaction in the face of these encounters" (*Ibid.*, pp. 32-33). Everything lies in the origin, the initial backlash, the reaction to what happens, the backlash when faced with reality, right when an event arises (not later on, when we theorize): either we accept that the question, the problem, emerges in the encounter with circumstances, or we "already know." If we "already know," then the problem doesn't even arise, and so why should I make the effort, why should I do anything? But the most serious thing is that, without problems, without a truly problematic attitude, without accepting the challenges that reality places in front of us, we cannot grasp the meaning of things and of life, because "[d]iscovering the meaning of life—or the most pertinent and important things in life—is a goal which is possible only for the individual who is involved with life seriously, its events, encounters, and problems" (*Ibid.*, p. 33).

This total, serious involvement with life is fundamental. I am sure that we are all involved in one way or another—otherwise, we wouldn't be here—but the real issue is totality; in fact, even when masked by a great deal of agitation, the center of the "I" can be stationary, blocked, for years. Then one talks about the concrete things that he has done, thinking that this demonstrates that he is moving. But agitation can hide the fact that, on many occasions, one is not moving in the depths of his being. The Pharisees did many more things than the publicans, but the center of their "I" was not moved. And one who is not moving in the depths of his being will never discover the meaning of life, which is a goal possible only for one who lets himself be provoked by and is involved with life seriously, in its totality. On what does one's ability to reach the meaning depend? On his involvement with the entirety



of life. Fr. Giussani places the origin of our difficulty here.

How can we tell if we have a truly problematic attitude, if we face reality, accepting the challenges that it throws at us? “When a problem arises, then, it implies that an interest has been sparked. Intellectual curiosity is thus aroused, unlike doubt [skepticism, already knowing], whose existential dynamic tends to corrode the active dynamism of interest and render us more and more extraneous to the object.” Interest and curiosity on one side, extraneousness on the other. And the object to which we become extraneous in our nonproblematic position can be the environment in which we live, “the fabric of influences we experience,” “the web of various circumstances.” The challenge, instead, is to our willingness “to be provoked by the problem,” by the totality of life. Otherwise, what do we see happen in us? A factious or unilateral way of living reality, which today is evident to all, and through which every “problem will appear in unclear terms and a human subject will easily feel impaired” (*Ibid.*). This description of our inability to move in the current situation without being overwhelmed seems written for today.

Giussani identifies the beginning of this difficulty in a process of disarticulation of a mentality that is organic, unitary, capable of grasping the connection between life and its meaning, and thus positing the problem adequately every step of the way. “The origin of this weakening of an organic mentality [...] is an option permanently open to the human soul. It occurs when there is a sad lack of committed interest and an absence of curiosity towards all reality” (*Ibid.*, p. 34). Last week, while I was teaching the first lesson on *The Religious Sense* at Catholic University in Milan, the phrase by Alexis Carrel that Fr. Giussani uses at the beginning of the book jumped out at me: “In the soothing softness of the modern world, the mass of traditional rules which gave consistency to life broke up.” Why? Because “the greater part of the restraints imposed on us by the cosmos have disappeared and, along with them, the creative personal effort which those restraints demanded” (A. Carrel, *Reflections on Life*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1952, pp. 21, 23). Carrel’s phrase interests us, not as a desire that the restraints imposed by the cosmos would return, but as a confirmation that, without the effort of facing life in all of its complications, the subject does not arise. If, there- ➤



» fore, the individual does not get involved in life in its totality, then his personality is not awakened and he thus becomes a “loose cannon,” as we see around us and often even among us. Consequently, we have trouble judging: “The frontiers of good and evil have vanished” (*Ibid.*), observes Carrel; one is bewildered, he doesn’t know how to judge, and division reigns everywhere. This is a good snapshot of the outcome of the election: division reigns everywhere. And this division, this fragmentation that we live in society, is a sign of bewilderment. But be careful—if this were to lead us to conclude that, since this difficulty exists, we need to give people an instruction manual, because it’s impossible for them to arrive at a judgment, then it would be the end; the problem would be definitively exacerbated. Instead of constantly inviting and challenging people to an involvement with all of reality—so that laziness doesn’t win, so that the center of the “I” doesn’t stand still, so that each one’s personality emerges—we give them an instruction manual, thus making everyone even lazier. Well done! Do we think that we will solve the problem like this? In fact, we only introduce a distrust in the capacity of the “I” to judge. And if we insinuate this distrust into our way of educating, it’s all over! We will become potential victims of other people’s propaganda, all of us. Whoever assimilates this distrust into his capacity to judge will be overwhelmed by everything and anything, and will wind up at the mercy of the opinions of whoever yells louder.

But here, again, Fr. Giussani surprises us. It would seem

obvious to us to think that the more fundamental and existentially decisive an issue is, the more difficult it is for the subject to judge. No, no, no. It’s the opposite. “The more a value is vital and elementary in its importance [what are the values that are vital and elementary in their importance?—destiny, affection, common life [including politics]—the more our nature gives to each of us the intelligence to know and judge it” (L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s, 1997, p. 30). In reading Fr. Giussani, one always discovers something new; in coming to it with new questions, one is surprised by things he had previously overlooked. It’s not at all true that the more an issue is vital, the more we are helpless. No, no, no—the more nature gives to each of us the intelligence to know and judge it. Therefore, as Giussani emphasizes in the third chapter of *The Religious Sense*, “It seems evident to me [...] that the heart of the problem of human knowledge does not lie in a particular intellectual capacity,” but rather in a proper position, a correct attitude (as he defines it shortly thereafter). The question then is if we, educatively speaking, trust this capacity that nature has given us, or if we introduce a distrust, like the powers that be. Here we hit upon the fundamental element for education: trusting the capacity to judge that the Mystery has put within each of us in order to face the most elementary and fundamental problems of living, reawakening this capacity, and continually challenging it. The center of the whole problem is to reawaken the proper position in the other person, the correct at-

titude that allows him to face every issue. What is the first sign that we love another person? That we stimulate his freedom, that is, we transmit this trust in himself to him—otherwise, the affirmation of the other is all talk.

The certainty that the Mystery has put freedom and the capacity to judge in each of us is what allows us to really understand what Christ did with man.

2. THE TASK OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

What did Christ come to do? Giussani writes, "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." By His incarnation, Christ radicalized the method used by the Mystery to reawaken the "I" constantly, to arouse that problematic attitude, and to rekindle that interest that can bring man to engage with all of reality, in such a way as to grasp the meaning of life. He did not come as a substitute for us, to make us into dolls or puppets, but to create real men. "Jesus Christ came to call man back to true *religiosity*, without which every claim to a solution of those problems is a lie. The problems of the knowledge of the meaning of things (truth), making use of things (work), human awareness (love), and human co-existence (society and politics) lack a proper formulation and so [here is the origin of the confusion], to the extent that religiosity is not at the foundation of the search for their solution, they generate ever greater confusion in the history of the individual and humanity as a whole." In other words, these problems are approached without the awareness of our need, of our original dependence—that is, of what we are. "It is not the task of Jesus to resolve all the various problems [that would make us even more into puppets], 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 1998, pp. 97-98).

We can thus help each other to understand what the true relationship between the "I" and the "we," the individual and the community, is. What we have cited is, in fact, the same task of the Church: "If the Church were to proclaim that its aim was [to give solutions,] to take over the human effort of self-advancement, self-expression, and human searching, it would be acting like the kind of parents [...] who are deluded into thinking that they can resolve their children's problems by taking their place" (L. Giussani,

Why the Church?, op. cit., p. 155). There is a way of saying "we"—of treating each other, of leading a community—that is analogous to the attitude of those parents with their children. Giussani warns us that this is an illusion. "This would be an illusion for the Church, too, because it would mean falling short of its educational task." Understanding this educational task is decisive, if we want to generate a subject that is capable of facing the social, cultural, and political situation, in such a way as not to be overwhelmed by the torrent of circumstances. "Moreover, this illusion would also diminish the essential history of the Christian phenomenon, and it would impoverish man's journey." There is a way of interpreting Christianity that impoverishes man's journey. "The Church's direct task, then, is not to provide man with solutions to the problems he encounters on his way. Rather, [...] its proclaimed function in history [as the continuation of the presence of Jesus in history] is to educate us to the religious sense [that is, to the need, the awareness, of our being]. This implies the appeal for man to adopt the right attitude to reality and the questions [and problems] it poses [because this attitude] [...] constitutes the best condition that man can have for finding more adequate answers to those questions." Giussani insists that "the spectrum of human problems

could never be removed from the realm of man's freedom and creativity. It is not the Church's task to provide him with a prepackaged solution [instruction manual], and, if it were to do that, it would fall short of its own foremost educational attitude. It would devalue 'time'" (*Ibid.*, pp. 155–156).

Man's temptation to ask for the solution to his problems is not new. Giussani cites this example, from Luke's Gospel: "Someone in the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.'" That's just like

asking, "Can you tell me who to vote for? Why won't you tell me?" And Jesus responds, "Friend, who appointed Me as your judge and arbitrator? [...] Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions" (*Lk* 12:13-15). Giussani comments, "Although Luke is the only one to report this incident, it cannot have been unusual for people to look to Jesus to resolve quarrels and controversies, as they often did with people acknowledged to be masters. How instinctive it is in man to think he has found the source of solutions to his problems! [This is striking!] However, Jesus immediately clears the air of this misunderstanding; He who showed Himself to be the authoritative judge of man's sins [He had not avoided judging on many other occasions], who challenged public opinion [...] makes a decisive declaration in this case: it is not up to Him to arbitrate on ►►

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» the matter. Undoubtedly, He must have disconcerted His interlocutor [as many of us are disconcerted when we are not given directions on how to vote; I understand it well]. However, Jesus does not neglect to fulfill what He is there to do" (L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, op. cit., p. 156). Thus, the Church, in continuity with Jesus, says of these things that, aside from recalling us to the attitude that Jesus indicates, it has nothing more to add. That doesn't mean that Jesus says nothing, or proposes nothing, just because He doesn't resolve the dispute. Do you think that, if He had given them a solution, they would have stopped arguing? They would have started again! And do you think that, if we had told you how to vote, the problems would be resolved? Predictably, if one of us had turned to the authority of the Movement looking for clear electoral directions and had been told who to vote for, but the response did not coincide with what he already thought and had decided in his heart, he would have objected immediately: "No! Not that party, no!" Now, it's not that Jesus, by acting in this way with the two brothers, is not proposing anything. He says, if you want to resolve this issue, don't ask me for a solution; rather, ask yourselves what attitude you need to have in order to approach the issue in the right way—that is, don't attach yourselves to things on which your life does not depend. Jesus is therefore saying that, if their criterion of judgment is not centered, if they do not have the right attitude, then they will not be able to resolve the dispute, they will not be able to arrive at an adequate solution. "Christ, like the Church [...], did not come to resolve problems of justice. No, He came to place the condition in man's heart without which the justice of this world could have the same root as injustice" (*Ibid.*). Many times, this seems like very little to us. We have seen this lately, too—what Jesus says seems like very little, and not sufficiently concrete with respect to the need that we have (to not make a wrong move just before we reach the goal). But Giussani, who knows us like the back of his hand, observes: be careful, as "[i]t is not that Christ and the Church have no function at all as far as men's problems are concerned [they have a real contribution, an essential proposal]. [...] Of course, this is not a magic formula for the mechanical avoidance of such crimes [with respect to the two brothers or to justice]. Yet it is the basis for which the solution may more easily be more human [...]." How do we recognize the humanity of the solution? "I must repeat that the essential symptom of the humanity of a solution is freedom—freedom in its most powerful, full sense, a freedom to which Christ and the Church recall us, the freedom of the man who keeps vigil, with a watchful eye and a soul wide open to his origin and his destiny" (*Ibid.*, p. 157).

The issue is the type of community is necessary for the growth of the "I," so that a reawakening of the "I" occurs.

In these words, we find a complete response to the question about the relationship between the "I" and the "we." There is a modality of this relationship that leads to an exaltation of the "I," to a capacity to judge (like for the two brothers), and there is one (like for the parents in the earlier example) that substitutes itself for the "I," so that one's personality does not emerge, and a subject capable of judgment is not generated. The relationship between the "I" and the "we" can be structured in many ways. Thus, if we don't help each other to understand the link, to establish clearly what the real relationship between the "I" and the "we" is, then we go back to stumbling.

Decisive questions for our journey are emerging, which need to be clarified—and not because we need to criticize ourselves. When Giussani said that what happened at the beginning of the Movement, when following an imposing presence ("The Movement was born out of a presence that imposed itself and brought to people's lives the provocation of a promise to follow") had become "organization," he became aware of something distorted in our experience. This didn't mean that there should be no more "we," but that there was a type of "we" that was not adequate for the "I." The alternative to a distorted "we" is not to eliminate the "we" in order to emphasize the "I," but it is to find once

more the reasons for a "we" that is adequate for the needs of the "I." Affirming the "I" does not mean going against the "we." The question is what image we have of the "we" in our way of thinking about politics, approaching the election, accompanying each other, living the community, living a Fraternity, living friendship, and living relationships in our families. What is the nature of the "we"? When one puts the "I" and the "we" in opposition, he errs, because no one wants to take the "we" away from experience. The problem is to clarify which "we" we are discussing.

So let's stop saying that we contrast the "I" and the "we," as an excuse not to change. We are not contrasting them. What we are contrasting is one "we" and another "we." When Fr. Giussani said that CL had become an organization, he was not saying that the community therefore had to become "liquid," inconsistent, but he was making a precise correction; he was saying that the community was no longer a place of generation of the "I," that it was not a "we" adequate for the needs of the "I." An organization will never respond to the needs of the "I"—never. And if the "we" is not a place that is adequate for the "I," then a "we" like this will no longer interest the "I." Thus the "I" will look elsewhere for a place, whether it wants to or not. And abstractly defending the "we" will not be enough, because people won't care; each person, in fact, has the criterion for judgment within himself.

So the issue is not just to affirm a "we," but the type of



“we,” the type of community, necessary for the growth of the “I,” adequate for the “I,” so that a reawakening of the “I” occurs. And if this reawakening does not occur, then we will all end up confused. Instead, if these “I”s emerge, then we can make a place of hope in reality. Thus, in the Note on the elections, recalling what Giussani told us, we reminded everyone, “The first level of political effect of a lively Christian community is its very existence” (L. Giussani, *Il Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione. Conversazioni con Robi Ronza* [*The Movement of Communion and Liberation: Conversations with Robi Ronza*], Jaca Book, Milan, 1986, p. 118). But pay attention to what it says, because the whole problem lies in the adjectives (“lively Christian community”): places can arise that are like organizations, in which the “I” wastes away, or “vital and authentic” Christian communities can multiply and spread, communities that reawaken the “I,” that interest and attract it, and thus the Christian community becomes one of the protagonists of civic life. What sort of places are these communities in which the “I” flourishes, that are capable of intercepting man’s original needs and offering an adequate response to them? If we don’t help each other in this, then we will end up changing our rallying cry, but nothing will really change. I would like each one of us to perceive just how urgent this is.

We need to mature a full awareness of what we are, in order to be able to build adequate places for the growth of the “I,” and not perpetuate places that are just “organization.” In my opinion, this is the level at which the game is played, and this is what Fr. Giussani was reminding us about.

In 1969, Joseph Ratzinger said, “From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge—a Church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices she built in prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so will she lose many of her social privileges. [...] It will be a more spiritual Church, and will not claim a political mandate flirting with the Right one minute and the Left the next. [...] The process of crystallization and clarification will cost her much valuable energy. It will make her poor and cause her to become the Church of the meek. [...] The process will be long and wearisome [...]. But when the trial of this sifting is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified Church” (J. Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, Ignatius Press, 2009, pp. 116–118). This is what happened to the people of Israel: when they had been stripped of everything, then the “remnant” about which Benedict XVI has been talking recently, the rem- ➤

» nant of Israel, emerged. It's what Fr. Giussani also said, many years ago: "Truly—not in a manner of speaking, not intentionally, but truly—if there were only 10 of us left instead of the whole Movement, our will for truth would leave us painfully intact, painfully at peace, and painfully keen to start from the beginning, to start over continually." What is Giussani trying to say with this extreme example? That "our attitude would not be determined—like euphoria or dejection, like exaltation or boredom or disappointment—by the outcome of things, by the social outcome of things" (CL National Council, Milan, January 15–16, 1977). Therefore, because of everything that we are living, it is as if we had to start over with simplicity by proposing gestures, places, in which new, different people are born. This brings us to the last point.

3. THE RELEVANCE OF FAITH TO LIFE'S NEEDS

Not just any "we," not just any place, is good enough, because we can become an association instead of a movement, and we can start over without having learned anything. This is where the challenge of the Year of Faith, the Synod with its call to conversion, and the Pope's gesture of renunciation come together. Friends, if we don't verify the relevance of faith to life's needs, precisely in this situation that we are going through, then our faith will not be strong enough to endure and we will not have adequate reasons to be Christians. We can stay with CL, but our interest will shift elsewhere: Christ will no longer be the center of our affection, Christ will no longer be what we hold most dear. Fr. Giussani's challenge will always be there, in front of our eyes: either faith is a present experience that is confirmed by it... And what is the confirmation? That it is useful in responding to life's needs, from the education of our children to politics; from the problem of illness to the problem of work; from the most personal problem to the social one. Otherwise, it will not be a faith capable of enduring in a world where everything—everything—says the opposite.

If our experience of faith is not the constant discovery of its relevance to life's needs, and thus the needs that we have at work or when faced with the election, then the beginnings of dualism are introduced. This is where the challenge lies: is Christ so real that He can respond to our needs? Is He so real—as Saint Ambrose witnessed to us—that He makes it possible for a man to challenge the emperor, that He makes him that free? Man's life hinges on satisfaction, as Saint Thomas Aquinas reminded us: "Man's life consists in the affection that principally sustains it and in which he finds his greatest satisfaction" (*Summa Theologiae*, II, IIæ, q. 179, a. 1). Therefore, either we have the experience of a real satisfac-

tion, because Christ is not abstract, but real—as the Pope witnessed to us with his gesture—or, not finding this satisfaction, we look for it elsewhere, in the crumbs dropped by those in power. But crumbs are not enough for the capacity of the heart. If Christ is not the experience that satisfies us, then, like everyone else, we depend on the outcome of other things: elections, our careers, our own projects. Only by taking all of our need seriously can we understand what the Christian proposal truly is, what sort of promise the presence of Christ makes to our lives. Otherwise, we are like everyone else: when things go well, we are happy, and when they go badly, we are disappointed. Never free! The freedom of the Pope's gesture is based on a fullness, that fullness that comes from the relationship with Christ present. When we lack the awareness of what we are and don't accept the problematic nature of life—which gives rise to our need for totality—then we don't even realize what Christ is, what the value of Christ is for us. And then faith is at risk: Christ is unable to take hold of the "I," and if He doesn't take hold of it, then we become loose cannons.

Therefore, it's time to sum up, that is, it's time for each of us to look at himself and say: have I emerged from this period—all of this year, in which we were ceaselessly challenged—with more certainty regarding Christ or not? Because otherwise, happy or dejected, we have wasted our time. We get worked up here and there, but we are virtually disappointed by faith; faith is emptied because we don't see its relevance to life's needs in our experience. We can't start over by simply changing our rallying cry or our strategy, but only by conversion. If we are not converted, if we do not have a real experience of Christ present, then we repeat the reductions and errors that we have already tried.

This past year is a very powerful call from God to conversion, and therefore to that experience of fullness and freedom, generated by the contemporary presence of Christ, that is the only thing capable of challenging the image that many people have of us, at least here in Italy: a political group looking for power. If we don't have the experience of this fulfillment, of this human diversity, then we will not be able to respond to the challenge of the situation.

The Mystery demonstrated to us that this experience is possible with Benedict XVI's disarming gesture, with his certain, joyful face. Each person can say whatever he wants, but behind the closing door of Castel Gandolfo was the joyful face of a man. Saint Ambrose's famous phrase acquires a particular density for us now: *Ubi fides, ibi libertas* (*Ep.* 65.5). "Where there is faith, there is freedom." Faith is the recognition of a present Presence, so real that it makes freedom, happiness, and joy possible. This is the meaning of the Pope's gesture. I

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