

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, February 17, 2016

Reference text: L. Giussani, “The Three Constituent Factors,” in Why the Church? McGill-Queen’s, 2001, pp. 72-87.

- *Non son sincera*
- *My Father Sings to Me*

Glory Be

We had given ourselves the first part of the fifth chapter of *Why the Church?* to work on, which addresses the constituent factors of that phenomenon that is called “Church.” This work is proposed to us – coincidentally, not by design – at a moment in which we are going through some circumstances that to us could seem just chaotic, considering everything that is happening among us, and which the Lord is not sparing us. Instead, we can look at them as a possibility, as an opportunity for our maturation. How? This is what we need to understand, because nothing happens automatically. I imagine that, in another context, we could have approached this chapter by making remarks about the text, almost without letting ourselves be struck. It won’t be like this now! It cannot be like this, with everything that is happening. That is why it is providential that we can live this circumstance as an opportunity to help us understand what we thought we already knew, that is, the nature of the Church. The first point that Fr. Giussani highlights is that anyone who found himself in Jerusalem and observed the emergence of the first nucleus of the Church would have met the reality of a sociologically identifiable community. “Primarily, the Christian fact presents itself in history [...] to the observer as *community*” (p.72). In short, according to the image that we all have in mind, we can say, “They were all together in Solomon’s Portico” (*Acts* 5: 12). Fr. Giussani comments: What would a pilgrim who had arrived in Jerusalem for Passover, or any other feast, have thought if, going to the temple for a few days in a row, he had noticed the same little group of people under that portico each time? “The first day he might have proceeded on his way without wondering why, and on the second day he might have done the same. But, at some point, he certainly would have asked someone: ‘Who are those people I always see together here?’ And they would have replied: ‘They are the followers of Jesus of Nazareth’” (p. 73). This is what we must verify. Imagine that, in the past few weeks, a present-day “pilgrim” had arrived in Italy from who knows where, and had come upon our “reality of a sociologically identifiable community” through newspapers, websites, blogs, social networks, our small Fraternity groups, or various friendships. Following the example of the ancient pilgrim, in noticing us, he might ask, “Who are these CL people? Who are they?” Beyond the choice of going to Rome [for the *Family Day* rally] or not – which was left to the decision of the laity, because truth can only be obtained from within the experience of freedom – in observing us in action, listening to us speak about each other, with each other, or against each other (because all sorts of things happened) on the trip to

Rome for those who went, and at home for those who didn't, well: What would that pilgrim have discovered about us? What would he have understood about us? What is most important to us? This concerns all of us, because we all belong to this sociologically identifiable reality. We can all see how we presented ourselves. What would this "pilgrim" answer? Would he answer as Fr. Giussani says in the text of the School of Community? This means living School of Community, not only by making comments about the text, but by using it as it is proposed to us, that is, as a criterion for judgment, as a point of comparison. What have we learned about what the Church is, or better, about our self-awareness of the Church and ourselves? That first community was aware of having been chosen by God. Is this what prevailed during the past weeks? What kind of awareness would this "pilgrim" discover by watching us? I am not asking this to test whether we are at the height of things – this is not what interests me at the moment. The problem is what kind of awareness we have. Because we could say, "I know very well that we were chosen by God," but does this prevail in our way of living? As you can see, having the text of the School of Community, where the whole truth about the Church is presented through Fr. Giussani's healthy doctrine, is not enough for this self-awareness to prevail. "The first nucleus of the Church demonstrated that it 'not only carries on His work (Christ's), but she is His very continuation, in a sense far more real than that in which it can be said that any human institution is its founder's continuation'" (p. 72). If, after having started the Church, Christ doesn't happen within us in the present, then what can be seen? What are we? What do we live? Instead, when He does happen, what do we see?

I went to Africa to preach the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Saint Joseph. There is a friend of ours who lives there; 10 years ago, when she decided to live her life in the vocation to virginity, her family declared her dead. Literally – her mother and her sister went to the town hall, obtained the death certificate, and showed it to her: "You are dead. You no longer exist – for us, for our tribe, for our village." Our friend – I don't know how, but in Africa it must be possible to continue life even without documents – went on for 10 years, working and living alone. After 10 years – that is, now – since all of her siblings have left, gotten married, thus leaving her mother alone, the mother thought that perhaps, rather than being alone, it was better to "resurrect" her daughter, and so... We were teasing her during the Exercises, telling her that not many people were resurrected after Lazarus. What struck me is that she told us that now there is a little moment of glory also for her, because she has "come back to life." Her relatives, her siblings, came back to her house and told her, "We don't really understand what happened, because for us, you were dead, you had left our family, you no longer existed. And yet, you continued to live, and to live well. You won, because you held out in the face of all of this. It means that you have a strength that we cannot explain. You must be a witch." Therefore, in those weeks, they were watching her, spying on what she was doing, in order to understand what strange magic she was performing in order to have this strength. While she was telling us these things, I looked at her and was moved, because I thought: look, the two of us, who need a translator to communicate, because I speak

Italian and you speak French, are far from each other, culturally and geographically distant, and yet we are one, more so than you are one with your whole family and all of your tradition! I thought of the passage from the School of Community that says that all of the distance disappears, that the people of God is born of the awareness of having been chosen and of the fact that something happened to them. I observed this at the Exercises: we are one because we are aware. I understand you more than your mother and your sister, and we are together. When I returned to Italy, we had School of Community in the evening, and all of the issues came up: Family Day no, Family Day yes (it had already happened), I went, I didn't, discussions... I still had our friend and what I had lived in Africa fresh in my mind, so I said, "I can discuss the Family Day and everything else as long as you want, but if we don't first recognize that we have been brought together by the One who happened... We can even argue our way to an agreement, but what brings us together comes first, came first, happened. Let's ask to recognize it, because then we can also be free to have different opinions, to discuss where we stand, but within a gladness for the fact that we have been brought together. Otherwise, we can even try to get along, have the same opinion, but I am more distant from you than from our African friend."

This is the point: whether this "first," this belonging to Christ who chose us, prevails or not. If it prevails, then – as you said – we can go on, each according to the time of what he is able to understand or see. But does it prevail? I am very struck by this, because it means that the fundamental problem is not – as we sometimes discuss among ourselves – the contrast between public and private witness. I think that this is a pretext to avoid addressing the real issue: what defines witnessing, that is, what is the content of our self-awareness. Is the content of our witness so powerful that it even wins over a family and a society that declared you officially dead? If Christ doesn't happen as powerfully as in that woman, to the point of being able to win even when she is losing (in some way) – because the power of Christ present and risen is greater than any other circumstance – then how will we be able to live the faith and be determined by it? If this is not the content of our self-awareness, then we – individually or together – are like everyone else. For this reason, I will go back to some of Fr. Giussani's reflections on the Movement's attempt to answer the challenge of 1968 with the great success of the Palalido: "The success of the convention at the Palalido was, paradoxically, the origin of a great misunderstanding [...]. It is true that we were engaged in proposing the concrete details of the Christian fact, but only within the limits of a horizon that had already been determined by others" (L. Giussani, *Il movimento di Comunione e Liberazione (1954-1986)* [*The Movement of Communion and Liberation (1954-1986)*], BUR, Milan 2014, p. 169). This misunderstanding is the most difficult thing to overcome because, as he told us on many occasions throughout our history, "it's as if the Movement [...], from 1970 on [I don't know whether we have solved this problem yet!], had worked, built, and fought on the values that Christ brought, while the fact of Christ, for us, for ourselves and for all of those who participated in CL with us, 'had remained something parallel'" (L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)* [*Men Without a Homeland (1982-1983)*], BUR, Milan 2008, p. 56). He wasn't juxtaposing a private "I" and a visible "we." We were visible and observable, and he was correcting

us on this, on the content of our self-awareness, on what we were witnessing. Therefore, in this precise moment, this chapter of *Why the Church?* can help us to recover an awareness that is not sufficiently alive, so that the chaos that we see doesn't prevail. Instead, when one comes upon a reality, even a small one, that demonstrates that Christ is present, something happens.

I recently met a young man. He is gay and has a partner with whom he lives and has a steady relationship. One day, he proposed this to me: "If you are not going to get married soon, we can have a child and then you can leave the baby to my partner and me." In that moment, I was speechless, and the only thing that I managed to say was, "I will have a child with my husband, certainly not to sell him. Imagine if you were that child: Would you want to be brought into the world and then given away?!" He was silent. Later that day, I thought back over what had happened and I started to cry, because I had never been treated like that. Some time later, we saw each other again, and I told him that what he had said that day had hurt me deeply, and that he couldn't treat a person like that. He tried to downplay it. After I said good-bye to him, I wanted to share what had happened with my girlfriends. In talking with them, I realized that I was still sad. I understood that that last conversation with him wasn't enough for me – something was still missing, I still didn't really feel as if I could breathe. Then I read the School of Community and your article in the Corriere della Sera, and it was freeing. First of all, I understood that it's not just a problem of familiarity, meaning that, after a while, one can take the liberty to say or ask certain things – that's not true. Then, I understood that I am exactly like him, and that I, too, can treat things and people like that. What has saved me has been the encounters that I have had in my life, with people who looked at me for the infinite that I am, and who embraced this identity of mine without reductions or blackmail. Rather, they loved my life for the need that it is, keeping it always open, and this started with the embrace of my parents and continued through my friends in the Movement. Only the event of a different humanity that corresponded to me saved me from my wretchedness (which is not at all different from that young man's), constantly restoring me to the original and authentic way of looking at myself. This is not just a problem of intelligence – that I am smarter than him in understanding how people should treat each other from an anthropological point of view – but it is a problem of experience, lived and judged. It has to do with the encounter with some faces that took hold of me, that restored me to myself by making me feel preferred. Thus, I understand the value of reality as given, so that I can make a journey toward my destiny, and I understand the value of the Church as a community of people brought together by an Other who is at work, who makes us every day, who continues to restore us to ourselves. Because if it were up to us, to our cleverness and ability, then we would continue to make mistakes, to be disappointed, to reduce each other. Therefore, I realize that today I am freer than before, because I no longer have to defend an ideology or an anthropology, but – a matter of life and death – the only thing that I have to defend is the possibility to look at reality as Christ does. I am thankful for having met this young man, because he allowed me to understand this more. Then, with regard to him, we will see how everything is lived and discovered.

Thank you. You probably didn't read what Fr. Giussani had already intuited in 1968, but for him, too, it was a sign of the times that being a Christian could no longer rest on a discourse about anthropology or tradition. "Neither tradition, nor a theory, nor an idea [...] [nor a] Christian philosophy, nor Christian theology, nor the concept of the universe that Christianity has can be the reason for adhering to Christianity." Moreover, "It wasn't even for the discussions that [Jesus] had, it wasn't for the clarifications that He gave, it wasn't for how He recalled people to the Old Testament, [...] [but only] because He was a presence full of a message" that could change one's life. Thus, Fr. Giussani used to say that "it is necessary for us to reexamine our entire discourse from the root" (A. Savorana, *Vita di Don Giussani [Life of Father Giussani]*, BUR, Milan 2014, p. 404); otherwise, we will not find an adequate reason to live our faith. In listening to your contribution, I am amazed by reading again in the text assigned for today, "That emergent group of people presented themselves as people who, having the living presence of Christ among them, were the almost physiological continuity of that reality, bonded as they were to that living presence in the concreteness of daily, family life. That newly emergent group was aware that it was prolonging, or rather [look at this concise expression that sums everything up, so typical of Fr. Giussani!] communicating and actually realizing [communicating by making it happen]" (p. 75). Do you see? Christianity is communicated by making it happen. It is an event; Christianity communicates itself by happening. It is only because of the difference in the people whom you met in your life that you were able not to succumb to the violence with which that young man treated you. It's not – as you rightly say – because you are more intelligent. No. "Only the event of a different humanity that corresponded to me saved me from my wretchedness," and for this – you add – "I am thankful." This is what allows us to become aware of what truly happened to us.

I was rather shocked by the affair of the Family Day, but it was a useful provocation. I didn't go, I was taking care of my nephews, but I was there with my whole heart. At the end of the last School of Community, I told myself: obedience is becoming work. I had not understood your position. I promised myself to ask the Lord to clarify my judgment, and that's what happened. A few evenings ago, our charitable work group had a dinner, which we do periodically, precisely in order to recover the true meaning of our actions. In front of my friends' very beautiful witnesses, I saw charity at work, and I understood that the essential was precisely a changed heart, capable of infinite charity and mercy (not simple generosity), changed by the companionship of Christ. The only possible way to change society is with Him. I saw the whole charism of the Movement, which fascinated and continues to fascinate me, in action. The horizon opened up before me. My narrow way of thinking without looking at reality was very difficult for me. It is really true that only in a tangible experience does the truth become flesh, thus freeing me and gladdening my life. Thank you very much for your persistent witness of love for Jesus and faithfulness to Fr. Giussani's charism. Please hold on. We need you, I need you.

This is the content of a self-awareness that is born of an experience. What defined us as we lived the past weeks? Our position with regard to what was at stake, or our self-awareness? Let's

compare – I am saying this in order to learn, not to beat us up, but to learn what happened to us – what we lived (with others and among ourselves) and what the School of Community says. “Paul, writing to Christians in Galatia, expressed the new concept in this way: ‘And you are, all of you, sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourself in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ’” (p. 77). We can fill our mouths with talk of “us,” of the community, but if this doesn’t prevail when a circumstance like the present one arrives... The great historical divisions (Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female) don’t prevent St. Paul from living the awareness that “we are one in Christ Jesus.” The question that is emerging is this: What is the foundation of our unity? Does our unity rest on the fact that we reach an agreement, or does our unity rest on the fact of being “one in Christ Jesus” by virtue of Baptism? This is the great cultural revolution. If this self-awareness does not prevail, then we are defined by our ethnic background rather than by faith. Listen to what one of you wrote to me. “Dear Fr. Julián, for a while now I haven’t done School of Community regularly with a group. I felt that the groups in which I had participated in the past worked in a theoretical way that was leaning too much on ‘discourse.’ In short, I felt like I was wasting time. Since then, I have done School of Community with some friends who help me more, but with whom it is difficult to meet regularly, and thus be consistent in our work. Something happened recently that called a few things into question. I got involved with some friends from the Movement in my city, in order to organize a public event that was very important to me. Thus, I was invited to participate in some of the leaders’ meetings in order to work on the preparation together. It was a great surprise! Most of the time during those evenings was not spent organizing things, but telling each other how and where each person recognized Jesus’ presence in his own life or other people’s lives. In short, the ‘center’ was not organization, but rather helping each other in this relationship! Unfortunately, even among us, our meetings do not usually focus on the relationship with Christ. Instead, for those people, that’s how it is. I told myself, ‘So it is still possible to talk about Jesus as one would talk about the potatoes being eaten at dinner!’ I started to desire to follow them. I am reading in *Why the Church?* that, for the first Christians, the ethnic aspect of God’s preference had been completely eliminated, that unity among them was based only on the fact that they had been brought together by God, and that this choice coincided with adhering to faith in Christ. I also read that this first factor has a precise cultural value: the truth for the Hebrew-Semitic tradition is represented much more by the image of the rock (that is, of the stability and solidity of the witness), than by the image of light (the evidence that I can see). I had read these lines many times and, to be honest, I had mostly felt that they were a philosophical detail that didn’t have much to do with my reality. This time, due to the experience that I have had, it was different [it is experience that makes a word that you read come alive!]. I realized that, in choosing not to do the common work of School of Community (but also on many other occasions), what prevails is my way of seeing and hearing, which remains the last word. Slowly, as time went on, without making a conscious decision, I stopped risking myself in the relationship with friends who witness Christ to me, giving precedence to what I could see and

live. I think that, lately, this has also become clear in the issue of the proposed law on civil unions and the *Family Day*. ‘This is not irrationalism, for an encounter with a person in whom we experience the truth he communicates to us does not mean we exclude a critical attitude. Rather, it ensures the immanence of a critical attitude in that whole living context from which the attitude cannot be separated. It is from this total context, therefore, that the person’s attitude assumes the authenticity of its dynamism. [...] The methodological lesson which definitively emerges from the rock as the image of truth is the solidity of the witness. [...] And let me insist on this point: if it is true, then these two methods are not contradictory, it is just that one is more complete than the other’ (p. 80-81). In light of these words and the experience that I recounted, I think that the question goes well beyond the choice of doing School of Community with this or that group. It is about the truth of my relationship with Christ. The most beautiful thing was that this slip of mine on this point was not an objection for Him. He continued to be close to me and, through an action that I started with a completely different intention (the organization of the public event that I mentioned), He corrected me, causing me to bump into the attraction of His presence again.” Today we are like nomads in this Babel of confusion, without something stable, because society is “fluid,” and we also participate in the same type of fluidity. Thus, the metaphor of the rock offers us something solid on which man can rest in his search for truth: “In adhering to someone he is listening to, man, in fact, must rest the *totality* of his person on the ‘you’ of another. And while it is very easy for all of us to doubt ourselves, it is much harder to cast the shadow of our ‘ifs’ and our ‘buts’ on a presence we admire and love” (p. 80). Therefore, the proposal that the Mystery makes to us in order to reach the truth is precisely this: to follow a witness. But the true difficulty is often suspicion regarding the solidity of the witness. How do I verify the solidity of the witness? Because everyone in the people of Israel already had this problem with the prophets: there were true prophets and false prophets. It is the same today, because nothing resembles the truth more than what looks true even if it’s not. So, how can we verify a witness?

I have been in CL for a long time, and I have lived the experience of the Movement for more than 35 years, since the bygone years of college. In this long journey – because, as Fr. Giussani witnessed to us and you witness to us today, it is a journey – I have had many moments of joy and gladness lived in His human companionship. Recently, I have been given to live, and in part I continue to live, some rather difficult circumstances through which reality has tightened its hold on me to the point of choking me. I have experienced the darkness of night, living without hope, which is not living. But by drawing on the reserve of the many true and intense moments that I have previously lived, I asked Him during the dark night not to let those circumstance take me away from His gaze, deprive me of His presence. I was crying out, begging Him to reveal Himself to me, because I couldn’t see Him, whereas I was the only one who was missing. Thus, little by little, I found myself alone, and the proposals of the Movement became simply something to do, sometimes a struggle. As the School of Community says, I was leaning only on myself, I was withdrawing from what reality asked of me, because I thought that those circumstances were

painful and undeserved. Meanwhile, the pretension that the companionship should take care of these problems kept growing. When I started to do the work of School of Community again after the Beginning Day last September, and accepted the challenge that you proposed to us – verification in reality – the miracle happened. Circumstances revealed themselves to be no longer hostile, but rather the way through which He makes me His. Even if the toil increased, it was no longer an objection. I was living the circumstances that I had previously avoided with great freedom and inner peace. Grateful and certain of having been loved, chosen, and wanted first, in spite of all of my limits and fragility, I felt reborn, finally able to embrace and love the cross.

So, what does the solidity of the witness cause you to discover?

The truth of His presence.

How do you know that it is His presence? Because what the witness promises happens. Just like with the prophets – they were real if and when what they promised came true. You started to follow again, accepting the challenge that I am proposing. What did this reveal in you? That the verification in reality showed a miracle, it showed the truth of what is proposed to you. If one doesn't make this verification, then he will never be able to judge whether the witness is solid or not. Therefore, how does one verify the truth of the witness? How, by leaning on the witness of another, do I regain the evidence that I had lost? Because the circumstances “revealed themselves to be no longer hostile, but rather the way through which He makes me His. The toil [...] was no longer an objection. I was living the circumstances [...] with great freedom and inner peace.”

Yes.

That is where all of the solidity is. It's not that I have to convince you that I am a great witness. You verify whether I am a witness by accepting the proposal made to you and seeing the evidence of what happens in your life with your own eyes. It is the same thing that Jesus says: “Whoever follows me will have the hundredfold.” There is a condition, though: following Him. Like with the prophets – there is no other way. Each person can also have verified it by accepting one of the options (going or not going) with regard to the *Family Day*. “I followed the debate on the Cirinnà Law closely by reading and comparing the various opinions, also with my life experience. For many years, I have paid close attention to the problems of gender issues and civil unions, homosexual unions, human rights, etc. In my humble opinion, the legal approval of homosexual marriage is as serious as the law on abortion, etc. What is important emerged clearly from your article in the *Corriere della Sera*: that we have to go to the heart of what sets us in motion. During the meeting that we had in our region, two positions emerged: ‘It is right to oppose it’ or ‘Only an encounter can make someone change.’ I said, ‘No, I think Julián is telling us that what matters to him is that we understand what our real need is, and also how to respond to what concerns us about the law.’ I went to Rome. I traveled by bus, we told each other our experiences, I saw good people in the square, very polite people, and I had the impression that most of them were like me. In the square, moment by moment, I was comparing myself with what the article said. Thus, the truthfulness of what it proposed became clear: only the encounter with a person who carries Christ in his heart, that is, a person who is generated by Him, resurrected by Him, can move the other

while fully respecting him, that is, respecting his freedom.” It’s not enough to repeat or shout the truth, because, as Fr. Giussani says, the “instrument [used by God] to facilitate the bond between man and truth [...] [is not] the terms of a vision, but those of an abandonment [this seems “irrational”], of a love [...] [this seems “too naïve.” It is a] process by which man follows the testimony of truth” (p. 81). God did this in nature: the child grows through the witness of his father and mother. It is very simple! But we rebel. We want to resist this method chosen by God, because it doesn’t seem critical enough to us. Fr. Giussani says, “The encounter with a person in whom we experience the truth he communicates to us does not mean we exclude a critical attitude. Rather, it ensures the immanence of a critical attitude in that whole living context from which the attitude cannot be separated. It is from this total context, therefore, that the person’s attitude assumes the authenticity of its dynamism” (p. 80). For this reason, if we don’t realize that we can only discover truth in this way, then we will find ourselves resting on something infinitely less substantial, and each person will verify that, unless he follows what struck him in the Christian encounter through which the Mystery reached all of us, he will not be able to resist the world’s logic. “Christians are often far from aware of this authentic source of their value, for we frequently find people who are either seeking clarity and security, or a motive for their actions, and in so doing, they interpret their own community, or movement, or special association in a reductive way, depriving themselves of the source of unity that gives them life – the mystery of the Church as Church. Or, there are those who in referring to the Church, mean a mechanical super-organism unrelated to their daily life” (p. 86). Fr. Giussani proposes the path: “Therefore, we learn what the total Church is by going to the core of the ecclesial experience that one has encountered, providing that it has all the characteristics of a true ecclesial experience [that is, the connection to the Church]. This means obedience to the total Church, depending on it, organizing one’s life according to its rhythms, seeing oneself reflected in the other factors within the sphere of the Christian life. These are aspects that define the validity of gathering together. Otherwise, what gives value to our coming together is not the Mystery of Jesus Christ who communicates Himself to history and the world, but something that has diminished its import” (p. 87). What is at stake here is precisely this: whether the subject of our gathering together is the Mystery of Christ, that is – friends – where we place our hope, also to sustain our family. It’s not that this causes us to ignore concrete reality. On the contrary, this is precisely why we cry out to the whole world that we hope in the Risen Christ! This can be communicated in any environment: “through a group of Christians conscious of their true belonging to the Church proper” (p. 87). Starting from this, we will give ourselves the time – I cannot linger any more on this tonight – to understand all of the details, even regarding the content of what was discussed in all of the conversations that took place recently. We will need to be patient and give ourselves time, without being inflexible or building walls, but rather listening to each other and following what is proposed to us. Then, perhaps, we will start to understand better, and everything that we are living will become an opportunity for each of us to grow and mature. To help us on this journey, I propose that you read Chapter 2 of *La bellezza disarmata* [*Unarmed Beauty*] (“Verità e libertà: un esempio paradigmatico” [“Truth and Freedom: A Paradigmatic

Example”], pp. 32-55), where I tried to explain that we are in a totally different context, in which the mentality is changing, and that we have a difficult time understanding this. As I said before, in 1968, Fr. Giussani understood immediately that something absolutely new was happening, and he was willing to reexamine his entire discourse. We still have a hard time understanding what happened in 1968, so imagine now, when everything is collapsing and we are facing historic turning points that no one could have foreseen even a short time ago! That is why we have trouble finding a way to be present in a pluralistic world where, as the Pope says, we Christians are not the only ones who offer a culture or a vision of reality, but we are one player among many. Truth cannot be imposed, but must be proposed through a journey of conviction, as Benedict XVI said: a way of being in reality that is not against freedom. This evening, I am going to give you some examples in order to help us to understand, and then we will prepare a more thorough text to be published in *Traces*. First example: the Italian referendum on divorce. Fr. Giussani had a clear judgment about the usefulness of the tool of the referendum to defend the family publicly. The Movement got involved in the campaign against legalizing divorce out of obedience to the ecclesiastical authority, but “for its part [...], CL would not have fully agreed with regard to the usefulness of such an initiative in the given circumstances” (L. Giussani, *Il movimento di Comunione e Liberazione (1954-1986)*, op. cit., p. 171). We can believe that certain initiatives are not useful in certain circumstances. It’s not that Fr. Giussani fell prey to relativism or secularism, and started to doubt the importance of the public defense of marriage, much less the Church’s doctrine regarding the issue. His was a historical judgment. Now that the Bishops give us the possibility to act as laypersons, can’t we be free to decide as such? Fr. Giussani was against the instrument of the referendum, not because he was a relativist, but simply because he had understood what was happening before everyone else. After the defeat at the referendum on divorce, Aldo Moro told the people in his party, “Sectors of public opinion [...] are now much clearer in asking that no forced change be made through the law, with the authority of power, to the common way of understanding and regulating human relationships in some sensitive aspects. We cannot ignore this circumstance, because by now it profoundly touches the democratic life of our country, sometimes advising the defense of Christian principles and values outside of laws and institutions, and therefore in the live, open, and available fabric of our social life” (Speech on July 19, 1974, the day after the referendum on divorce, at the National Council of the Christian Democracy. See A. Moro, *Scritti e Discorsi [Writings and Speeches]* (ed. G. Rossini), vol. VI (1974-1978), Cinque Lune, Rome 1990, p. 3155). This is not very different from Fr. Giussani: “In a society like this [ours], nothing new can be created except through a life – neither structure nor organization nor initiatives will work. Only a new and different life [within social life] can revolutionize structures, initiatives, and relationships – in short, everything” (“Movimento, ‘regola’ di libertà” [“Movement, ‘Rule’ of Freedom”], ed. O. Grassi, *Litterae communionis-CL*, November 1978, p. 44). For this reason, in the context of the early Church, a man like St. Augustine, for example, understood the difference between civil law (whose aim is coexistence) and ethics. The fact that civil law does not fully reflect Christian ethics does not mean that it has

no value: “The law that is given in order to guide the coexistence among men allows many things to go unpunished that are instead punished by divine providence. But he doesn’t condemn men’s laws because they don’t fix everything” (cf. St. Augustine in M. Borghesi, *Critica della teologia politica. Da Agostino a Peterson: la fine dell’era costantiniana* [*Critique of Political Theology. From Augustine to Peterson: the End of the Constantinian Era*], Marietti, Genoa 2013, p. 301). Cardinal George Cottier, who was the theologian of the Papal Household for many years, says, “The first Christian legislators [...] did not immediately repeal the Roman laws that tolerated practices that did not conform to [...] [the ethics of the Church, because] the Church always believed that the illusion of totally eradicating evil from history by legal means was foreign and dangerous” (G. Cottier, “La politica, la morale e il peccato originale” [“Politics, Ethics, and Original Sin”], in M. Borghesi, *Critica della teologia politica. Da Agostino a Peterson: la fine dell’era costantiniana*, op. cit., pp. 302-303). I will end by mentioning something else. During these weeks, one of the most quoted texts in the discussions was *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (2003), which states: “Legal recognition of homosexual unions or placing them on the same level as marriage” must be opposed. As you can see, it distinguishes the two things and condemns them both: civil unions and equivalency to marriage. In 2007, there was the discussion on the DICO [bill on the rights and duties of stably cohabitating couples], which you all remember; at the time, the entire Italian Church was against civil unions. Now it’s 2016, and almost everyone would accept homosexual civil unions, provided they were excluded from adoption and not placed on the same level as marriage. Is it because the Italian Church has suddenly become relativist, or because today’s civil laws, in order to assure coexistence, need to give space and recognition to people who think differently from natural or Catholic ethics? This doesn’t mean that we don’t have plenty of room to witness to the beauty of the family as God intended it by creating us male and female. So, friends, we need to give ourselves the time to realize what is happening. It is such a historic change that, if we do not help each other to understand it, then we facilitate useless discussions, instead of a dialogue that allows us to recover our place and our task: what we have to propose and to live, to communicate to our friends, precisely because of what we are, that is, a reality in the life of the Church, because we are Church. The School of Community in this period helps us to understand this. Along with the text from *La bellezza disarmata* (pp. 32-55) that I mentioned before, you can also reread the part of the Saturday morning lesson from the 2014 Fraternity Exercises (pp. 22-34 of the booklet “*Press On to Make Him My Own*”) where I had already presented the corrections that Fr. Giussani had made to us with regard to our way of being a sociologically identifiable reality. This is something that we still have not understood.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, March 16th at 9:00pm.

We will continue to work on Fr. Giussani's text *Why the Church?* by going over the chapter on "The Three Constituent Factors," "2. The Community Invested by a 'Strength from on High,'" pp. 87-95.

The time of Lent, which just began, must question all of us about the reason why the Church proposes it to us every year. This is a favorable occasion to further understand the journey that the Pope proposed to us with the Jubilee of Mercy. What does he ask us to change, also with regard to everything that we said? What is our need? What does the School of Community call us to change?

As you know, the February issue of *Tracce* contains the DVD with Fr. Giussani's lesson *Recognizing Christ* (which will also soon be available on the CL international website).

I remind you that the Fraternity Exercises will be held in Rimini from April 29th to May 1st. Registration online will open on March 18th and close on April 5th. Please verify your password immediately in order to ensure access to the website.

Finally, I want to mention the initiative promoted by the *Corriere della Sera* to republish 10 of Fr. Giussani's books on a weekly basis, available for purchase with the newspaper. The first – in newsstands on February 20th – will be *The Religious Sense*, with an introduction written for the occasion by Antonio Polito.

Veni Sancte Spiritus