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litterae communionis

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***“Who Is This Man?”***

**Beginning Day of the Adults and University Students of Communion and Liberation**

**Mediolanum Forum, Assago (Milan), September 28, 2019**



# “Who Is This Man?”

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### Julián Carrón

Let us ask the Holy Spirit for the poverty of heart that opens us to being seized by Christ.

*Come Holy Spirit*

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The philosopher and psychoanalyst Umberto Galimberti, asked in a recent interview what was the most frequent cause of anguish for his patients, said, “That provoked by nihilism. Young people today are not well, but they don’t even understand why. They lack purpose. For them, the future has changed from promising to threatening.” He added, “In 1979 when I began working as a psychoanalyst, the problems were grounded in emotions, feelings, and sexuality. Now they concern the void of meaning” (U. Galimberti, “A 18 anni via da casa: ci vuole un servizio civile di 12 mesi” [Out of the house at 18: what’s needed is 12 months of civil service], interview by S. Lorenzetto, *Corriere della Sera*, September 15, 2019).

I think his words clearly identify the challenge each of us faces. We see it every day, both personally and in society, as we have observed these days concerning the issue of the end of life. What’s at stake is so important that we must not try to minimize it. Any attempt to do so would only confirm how crucial the situation is.

This challenge cannot be faced with speeches about worldviews, or with moralism or sentimentalism, because they change nothing. Our experience of living is called into question. Professor Galimberti himself is aware of this, and in fact, when asked,

“What is the meaning of existence?” he said, “I have to seek it in the ethics of the limit, in what the Greeks called the golden mean.” Each of us can verify whether his answer can fill the “void of meaning” and face the nihilism he himself criticized.

I do not know whether his answer would satisfy an author like Houellebecq, who, in a letter to Bernard-Henri Lévy wrote: “More and more frequently, and it pains me to admit it, I felt a desire to be liked. On each occasion a little thought convinced me of the absurdity of this dream; life is limited and forgiveness impossible. But thought was powerless and the desire persisted—and, I have to admit, persists to this day” (quoted in *L’Osservatore Romano*, June 4, 2019 in “The ‘Unbalanced’ Power of Christianity, interview with Fr. Julián Carrón by Andrea Monda). Houellebecq, like Galimberti, perceives the limit of life, but this does not eliminate his yearning to be loved, even though he deems this desire absurd.

“How important it is to feel challenged by the questions of the men and women of today!” Pope Francis said recently in a speech to those participating in a gathering organized by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization (“Address to Participants in the International Meeting for Academic Centers and Schools of Evangelization,” September 21, 2019). In addition to the fact that we ourselves often have these questions, they push us to deal with the cultural context in which we live. Fr. Giussani proposed a road for responding to this provocation: experience.

## 1. Experience, the key word for everything

“The journey to truth is an experience” was our theme for this summer. Now, after what we have lived this summer, can we say whether it is really true that the journey to truth is an experience? Which things that have happened to each of us in these months document this for us? If the things we talk about do not happen in our experience, nothing will convince us or others of their truth. This is why Fr. Giussani’s insistence on experience was so radical. For him, “Reality makes itself evident in experience,” as he said to university students in 1996 (*In cammino [On the journey]: 1992-1998*, Bur, Milano 2014, p. 311), and therefore he stressed that “experience is the key word of everything” (*L'autocoscienza del cosmo [The self-awareness of the cosmos]*, Bur, Milano 2000, p. 274).

Consequently, if we do not want to lose the charism along the way, we must understand whether we are truly living experience.

“Those who do not start from experience,” Giussani stressed, “are fooling themselves; they want to fool themselves and others.” He continued, “People must necessarily start from experience,” because it is “the place where reality emerges [...] in [a] specific face, according to a specific aspect, according to a specific inflection.” (Ibid.) It is striking to see how so fierce a nihilist as Houellebecq bears witness to it in all its drama: his thought told him how absurd it was to want to be loved, but the thought could not counter the judgment that emerged in him and that allowed no possibility of dispute: “But thought was powerless and the desire persisted—and, I have to admit, persists to this day.” This judgment is from experience. Nothing can suppress that desire, and nothing can fulfill it. This shows us once again just how crucial Giussani’s indication of method is, as expressed as early as the first chapter of *The Religious Sense*. Experience is the only starting point that enables us to know ourselves and reality, to un-

derstand how things stand, and it frees us from slavery to images, frameworks, and the reductions to which we often succumb, shaped by external influences, by the common mind-set, or by what is most immediately convenient for us.

**But what is experience?** “Experience certainly means ‘trying’ something, but primarily it also coincides with a judgment we make about what we try. [...] Above all, the person is self-awareness. [...] Thus, experience implies understanding the meaning of things” (L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1997, p. 6). Therefore, we can say that the journey to truth is an experience only if we consciously compare what we go through against the needs that constitute us. It is not enough to repeat the formula like a mantra if deep down we constantly reduce experience to what we feel, to something sentimental, to its most evanescent aspect. Often even Christian experience, the Christian event, succumbs to

this. For this reason, Fr. Giussani wanted us to grasp clearly what he meant by the word “experience.” “Experience is a fundamental method through which nature facilitates the development of awareness and the growth of a person. Thus we cannot speak of experience without an awareness of ‘growing’ in it [we do not automatically realize and understand what happens to us]. However, to truly grow we need to be provoked or helped by something different from ourselves, by something *objective*, by something that we ‘encounter’” (L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2006, p. 105).

This method, which is valid in any sphere of knowledge, also applies to knowledge of the ystery. Giusani stated that “only through a true, objective experience can men and women become aware of the presence of God in the world,” and continued, “Saint John writes about it forcefully to the first Christians: ‘That life was made visible: we saw it and we are giving our testimony, telling you of eternal life which was with the Father and has been made visible to us.’ The presence of Christ in His Church becomes manifest through a true, objective [he said it a second time] experience in the life of one who lives with awareness. Even the encounter with the Christian community or the verification of its message [...] is a true, objective [again! Fr. Giussani insisted] experience.” (Ibid.) Three times Giussani repeated that what we are talking about is the

object of a “true, objective experience.” “True,” that is, effective, which has nothing to envy in any other experience. And “objective” because it is my running up against something outside myself, something I do not produce myself.

**About 20 days ago**, a friend in Salvador de Bahia told me, “Ever since I was a child, I’ve been close to the Protestant experience. When I was a bit older I was baptized, but the point came when I no longer wanted to live like them, and so I left and spent about a year questioning and even ridiculing religion. I sought out places that preached reason and science against religion, but in all that, the life I was living didn’t satisfy me. I wanted something else but didn’t know what it was. I began to research other religions but I always left out the Catholic Church because I thought it to be in error. One day, a childhood friend invited me to a costume party for the young people of his neighborhood, and I went, since there was nothing religious about it. But when I left the party, I began wondering why I had read about every religion but always ignored the Catholic Church. I began to take my questions seriously. Not only did I start reading something about the Catholic Church, but I also started truly seeking an answer that corresponded to my reason and my heart. In my search, I began to feel that what I was reading about the Catholic Church corresponded to me. It

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made sense to me. So I decided to convert, and I was baptized in the Catholic Church, and had my First Communion and Confirmation. I was happy, but I wanted to find something more. I wanted a place for myself. I saw a lot of environments but they left me feeling anguish because they gave me an image of the church as something very closed, continually on the lookout against the danger of an anti-pope, things of that kind. I wondered, 'Well, if that's the way it is, does it make sense to be Catholic?' So I continued my search, and one day came upon an interview in which Carrón said: 'If you don't think Francis is the cure, you don't grasp the disease' (J. Carrón, interview with John L. Allen and Ines San Martin, *Cruxnow.com*, June 21, 2017). I found it interesting because it was a different outlook, and even if in the other places people always ended up by concluding 'We have faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ,' something about the way Carrón said the same words expressed that they weren't just words on a page, but a living hope. I remember a passage in the interview that caught my attention. He was talking about some unmarried couples who began spending time with some CL families, and even if the CL families said nothing about their condition as the church saw it, those couples decided to get married, just because they had seen and

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encountered those families. So I said, this is interesting for me; this is what I've been looking for! I began following them. I wanted to know who Carrón was and who those people were. I followed and I met the CL people here in Salvador. I've stayed because I've seen something different, something that corresponded to me. I might not have stayed in the church if I hadn't found this place; I've begun to look at reality in a new way and to have a new gaze upon myself, a greater love." I'm amazed that someone so passionate in his search for an answer to the needs of his heart, a passion that developed because he was honest with his experience, could not stop until he had found a reality, a historical, objective, concrete face of the church, capable of attracting him and of responding to the expectant awaiting that constituted him.

**Keeping in mind what has been said to this point**, we can understand why at a certain point Fr. Giussani confessed, "The most important thing I've said in my life is that God, the Mystery, has revealed Himself, has communicated Himself to people in such a way as to make Himself objective in their experience. The Mystery *also* becomes object of our experience, becomes object of our experience by identifying Himself with a sign that is made of space and time" (*L'autocoscienza del cosmo*, pp. 164-65). This is crucial. "To be recognized, God entered man's life as a man, with a human form, so that man's thought, imagination, and affectivity were, in a way, 'blocked,' magnetized by Him" (L. Giussani, S. Alberto, and J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2010, p. 17). So then, this is the test that documents

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the presence of God in history, that is, Christ at work in our life: that we are “blocked,” magnetized by Him. The Gospel is an amazing documentation of this.

“A Pharisee invited Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that He was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind Him at His feet weeping and began to bathe His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.’ Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Simon, I

have something to say to you.’ ‘Tell me, teacher,’ he said. ‘Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days’ wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?’ Simon said in reply, ‘The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven.’ He said to him, ‘You have judged rightly.’ Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been for-

given; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’ He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The others at table said to themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ But He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace’” (Lk. 7:36-50). Here was a woman entirely drawn to Christ, magnetized.

This is the serious question for us and for the world. In fact, if we are not attracted like this, we are like a loose cannon, at the mercy of the tides of our thoughts, reactions, way of thinking, and way of facing things. In other words, abandoned to nothingness. The difference is crystal clear when we happen upon a person who is entirely seized, to the core of her being. This is faith. In fact, Jesus said, “Your faith has saved you.”



## 2. “When the Son of Man comes, will He still find faith on earth?”

So now we come to the second passage. Once this event has happened, once God has entered into history as a man to make Himself known to us, the only question is the one Fr. Giussani asked us at the Beginning Day last year, repeating Jesus’s question: “But when the Son of Man comes, will He still find faith on earth?” (*Lk.* 18:8). In other words, our problem is not whether He will find us talking about Him, having our meetings or doing certain gestures, but whether there will still be any left who are magnetized to Him, who have let themselves be seized by Him all the way down to their innermost depths, in order not to end up in nothingness. In order for this to happen, the presence that has entered into history must remain present, as we said in the second lesson of the Spiritual Exercises. In fact, it cannot be some effort of our own to make Him present. He promised that He would remain in history: “I am with you always, until the end of the age” (*Mt.* 28:20). So our true problem is whether we are open to perceiving Him in the present, like our friend in Salvador de Bahia, whether we perceive what is happening, and do not miss it: Him, Him who is happening. It is not necessarily the case that we perceive His presence in what happens and in the things we say to each other. As we heard Fr. Giussani say in the video shown at the last Beginning Day, this is not a matter of membership in an association. We can participate in an association and not perceive Him. An association does not resolve the problem of nihilism, of the lack of meaning. Only faith does this. For this reason, Fr. Giussani said, “It is faith that we seek, faith we want to penetrate, faith we want to live” (“Alive Means Present!” *Traces*, October 2018, “Page One,” p. 4.) because all the rest fails to magnetize us, to draw us away from nihilism.

But how is this possible today? Exactly as it was in the beginning: by running up against a presence charged with meaning that requires of us poverty and a will-

ingness to be amazed. When He happens again, He makes us poor and provokes in us that willingness to let ourselves to be amazed and seized, because otherwise, “devoid of wonder, we remain deaf to the sublime” (as Heschel says, quoted in Chapter 10 of *The Religious Sense*, in the line chosen as the title of the Meeting of Rimini 2020), that is, we remain deaf to what happens to us.

Therefore, Fr. Giussani invited us to try to imagine and share in what the first believers experienced. “How did they begin to believe?” He insisted on asking this question over and over so we would immerse ourselves in and identify with the beginning, which is the canon, the paradigm, of what happened, just as it has remained documented in the Holy Scriptures; it is the method for every moment of the journey. Here is how Giussani responded: “They didn’t believe because of the way Christ spoke, saying certain things; they didn’t believe because Christ worked miracles; they didn’t believe because Christ quoted the prophets; they didn’t believe because Christ raised the dead. Think how many people, the vast majority, heard Him speak that way, heard Him say those words, saw Him do those miracles, and the event didn’t happen for them. The event was something of which the miracles or sermons were components, segments, they were factors, but it was something else, something much, much more, something so beyond that it gave the words and the miracles their meaning” (“Alive Means Present!” p. 8).

**Well then, why did they believe?** “They believed because of what Christ showed Himself to be. [...] They believed because of a presence. A presence neither transparent nor opaque, not a faceless presence: a presence with a very specific face, a presence charged with words, charged with a proposal.” Now, as we see often, “not just any presence with a proposal is charged with meaning.” (*Ibid.*) We hear a lot of proposals, but which of them are able to attract us magnetically?

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8 When does it become clear that we have identified a presence charged with meaning? When we perceive that we are magnetized, seized, like the sinful woman, as it was in the beginning. This happens only in front of “a radical newness” that Giussani described with the terms “unforeseen” and “unforeseeable”: “it’s something that wasn’t and then is.” A proposal is charged with meaning when it “involves [...] the person who carries that meaning,” when it coincides with the presence of a person fully involved in the meaning the person carries. It is something that “can’t be reduced to the past,” (ibid., p. 9), a presence that expresses something more, unforeseen, unforeseeable, that did not exist before and now exists. If this does not happen now, and if it does not amaze us now, Christianity has become a past for us. Instead, “Alive means present!” It is there. It could not be, and yet it is there. The sign is that when I run up against a certain presence, a presence not produced by me, one that is objective, outside myself, then I spontaneously ask, “Who is this man?” (Mt. 8:27).

**That question describes something that continues** to happen today through us. I’m thinking of people who happen upon our presence when we are together or when we are alone, in the most varied of circumstances. I’m referring to the many stories of encounters that have happened during community vacations or at workplaces or universities. When people see the difference in our lives, when they see a human newness generated by grace in those who accept it, they ask, “Who are you? What in the world makes you this way?” Two thousand years later, the same question echoes in the world.

How does these questions arise? They are the epiphenomena, the indicator of something else that is not us. This is the key point: grasping what it means that someone asks these questions. Sometimes we stand there, a bit shocked, a bit obtuse, without wondering what they saw that made

them ask the questions. They found themselves in front of a presence that expressed a “more,” a “something” that went beyond the natural qualities or effort or good will of the people in front of them, something never seen before. (“I’ve never seen such a humanity!”) Otherwise the questions would not have arisen. They document a presence greater than ourselves at work in us, in people like us. (“Something that has something within,” as Fr. Giussani said in the passage we referred to from the Spiritual Exercises). The question wells up from the wonder at the “answer in action” to the thirst of the heart that is Christ alive. It emerges in front of the exceptionality of Christ who happens, even if He is not yet recognized as such for what He is.

If Christ were not present through a human sign there would be neither amazement nor questioning: the amazement that bursts into questioning is only generated in front of a living presence.

We, too, must be present with our poverty, our openness and willingness, like beggars who wait for the happening of a presence equal to the greatness of human desire. In fact, we can be in front of the same phenomenon of human difference and remain blind: the exceptional happens and we do not see it, are not amazed by it, and no question is born in us. Therefore, even though we are immersed in this



presence, instead of growing in the wonder that causes the questions to arise, we often say, “We already know that. Pffff.” When I hear that, I feel so discouraged. Not even a crumb of wonder! Well, of course no question can emerge! For this reason, if we return home with just the question “Who is this man?” our coming here today will not have been in vain.

**We can verify this** every day: how often are we amazed and magnetized by a presence, and how often instead do we just talk about it, repeating words or describing facts, regardless of how extraordinary, but without being amazed by the “more” that happens in front of us, and without the question of “Who is this man” arising in us? This will lead us to skepticism because it no longer suffices to know the right things: the challenge identified by Galimberti does not allow us this. Nor is it enough to say the right words. When “He returns,” He will not find anyone among us who is still amazed by His presence, who recognizes Him really present in the flesh in a changed humanity, even if we continue to belong to the association. What is at stake is not the association, but faith, and faith is only this: the acknowledgment of His present presence that continues to happen now as it did 2,000 years ago.

Christ is not closed up in the past. His happening, the happening that won over each of us, or we would not be here today, is not preserved in a museum (Pope Francis told us this in Saint Peter’s Square, remember?); it does not belong to the memories of once upon a time. It is now, and it is now in the flesh! A past is not sufficient to make the faith interesting for each of us today, just as it was not sufficient in the beginning. Something has to happen in the present. “Then they came to Capernaum, and on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught [back then, people usually went to the synagogue to hear someone preach, but on that occasion they were shocked]. The people were astonished at His teaching [many people taught, many made proposals while commenting on the scriptures], for He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he

cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? [even the demons recognized Him] I know who you are—the Holy One of God!’ Jesus rebuked him and said, ‘Quiet! Come out of him!’ The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed [at Jesus’s words and gestures] and asked one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority [that could not be reduced to the past, to the already known]. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.’ His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee” (Mk. 1:21-28). We often hear comments on the scriptures but are not amazed by them. What made the difference was finding oneself in front of an authority that, because of the newness of what He said, prompted the question, “What is this?”

Fr. Giussani shows us how crucial this authority is. Let’s listen to him!

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Faith is the acknowledgment  
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## From a conversation of Luigi Giussani with a group of *Memores Domini* (Milan, September 29, 1991)

*Transcript of the recording played during the Beginning Day, September 28, 2019 and preserved in the historical archive of the Memores Domini Ecclesial Association. (Cf. "Joy, Happiness and Boldness: No One Generates Unless He Is Generated," Journey, the CL Magazine, n. 2/1997, p. 11).*

### Luigi Giussani

What is the most important factor in the life of a people as a people; in the life of a companionship as a companionship, the same theme you reflected upon this morning; in the life of the people to which we have been called, the companionship in which we participate, the place of prophecy and of crying out that everything is God, the true place of the religious sense?

The most important factor for a people as a people, for a companionship as a companionship, is what we call "authority."

There is a deep need for us to tear down, down to the last stone, the image we have of a "robotic" authority or leadership, almost as if it were a person, [as if] it were people closed up in a tower, directing, sending down signals, directing how things go from above.

Authority, leadership, is the exact opposite of power; there is not even a trace, not a hint, of the word "power." Consequently, there is a total absence regarding the concept of authority in the people of God, at any level. There is a complete absence of any glint of fear: because fear goes along with power, and to free oneself from fear, you have to defiantly disregard power.

What is this authority? I will give a definition. [Authority] is the place—because you, too, are a place, right? A person is a place—it is the place where that battle to affirm, the battle of the prophecy and its verification, the place where that battle and the verification that our proposal, which is Christ's proposal, is a response to what is perceived in the heart... authority is the place where the battle to affirm, and the verification to confirm that Christ's proposal, is true, meaning it is a response to the perception, to the needs of one's heart (to the religious sense, which is given by the needs of one's heart, and assesses the response placed in front of it) is clearer and simpler—so it does not breed fear—it is more peaceful. Authority is the place where the verification that compares the perception, the needs of one's heart, and the response given in the message of Christ, is clearer and simpler, and therefore is more peaceful.

A line from Pasolini, one that I have quoted often lately, says that men are not educated, that young people are not educated: if someone educates them, it is with his being, and not with lectures.

Authority is the place where the connection between the needs of the heart and the response Christ gives is clearer, simpler, and more peaceful. [This] would suggest that authority is a way of being, not a font of discourse. Lectures are part of what makes up one's being, but only as a reflection. To summarize, authority is a person who, when you see them, you can see how what Christ says corresponds to your heart. This is what guides a people.

Now, the second idea: the problem is not following... The problem is following, but it is not described completely or best by the word "following:" it is better described by the word "sonship." An authority has sons and daughters. A son receives his family tree from his father. He makes it his own; he is made up of that family tree his father gives him, he is made up of his father. Therefore, he is entirely absorbed. Authority absorbs all of me. It is not a word I fear or dread or that I follow. It absorbs me. The word, "authority," then, ...the word "authority" could have as its synonym the word "paternity," meaning generativity, generation, the communication of a *genus*, communicating a living family tree. That living family tree is my "I" which is overtaken and made different by this relationship.

**The word "authority,"** which coincides with the word "paternity," is followed by the word "freedom." It generates freedom. Being a son or daughter is freedom. The Gospel, in fact, says this at various points. "Tell me," Jesus says to Peter, "is it the king's son who pays the tribute? No, it is the servants, because what belongs to a father belongs to his son."

Therefore, authority is true, or truly experienced as such, when it ignites my freedom, when it ignites my personal awareness and personal responsibility, my personal awareness and responsibility.

This means, as someone rightly observed, that when Jesus turned and said, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Christ's questions moved Peter from a logic of friendship-be-

*“Authority is a person who, when you see them, you can see how what Christ says corresponds to your heart”*

fore he was a friend, an acquaintance—to a responsibility of his personal awareness, to the order of personal responsibility. It was his responsibility when he said, “You are the Christ, the Son of God;” in that moment, the friendship he had with Christ became...it was suddenly illuminated by personal awareness and responsibility, of awareness and responsibility that expressed that awareness.

There is no relationship with a place of authority, with the person who is an authority, if you do not feel your freedom bursting forth as personal awareness and personal responsibility.

Third: if authority, then, is such a source of freedom, it becomes a place of comfort and makes the entire companionship, the entire people a place of comfort. In what sense? A place of comfort because, if I see a person in whom Christ has conquered, conquers, claims and convinces, it shows how He corresponds to the needs of the heart. If someone shows me, is proof of this to me; if in seeing a person I understand that this is happening in him, then I begin to understand that this also happens for the companionship. So then—no matter how I feel, no matter what mood I am in, whether I have taken many steps or just a few—I am filled with comfort: “Your precepts bring joy to the heart,” bring comfort, because Christ conquers.

Authority is the place it is evident that Christ conquers. What does it mean that Christ conquers? That Christ demonstrates, even in appearances, even in the realm of appearances, He demonstrates that He corresponds, He corresponds to the needs of the heart in a persuasive, a prophetic way. The same will happen for me, too. It seems impossible. For that other person who is an authority, it was impossible, but now it is possible; it is a reality. Christ conquers.

Authority, then, is a place of paternity where new life—the life in which Christ responds to one’s heart, [to] that for which man is made, where Christ responds to man’s heart—is more transparent, clearer and more transparent. This is true authority. This means the old woman who puts the coins in the treasury of the Temple can be an authority, even more than the head of the Pharisees.

This paternal, generative authority makes itself visible in the experience of greater freedom, personal awareness and personal responsibility, so that even if everyone went away, if everyone was out of the picture, if everyone else betrayed—as one really beautiful quote that I read at the last day of the year, the first day of the year—if everyone else betrayed, I would still say to you, “Yes!” This is personal awareness and responsibility. And because of this, authority is a place of comfort, where you see that Christ conquers. And, in this way, authority completes its true mandate, because it exalts the people, it helps you understand that the entire people, the entire companionship is the place where Christ conquers. ■

## **Carrón**

Authority is the most important factor of the reality of a people, because without authority, a people is not generated. Therefore, each of us is called to recognize it where it is, because, as we have just heard, “the old woman who puts the coins in the treasury of the Temple can be an authority, even more than the head of the Pharisees.” What demonstrates authority? An authority is “a person who, when you see them, you can see how what Christ says corresponds to your heart” and for this reason is a comfort for all of us, regardless of the point we have reached on the journey.

During a School of Community, a friend recounted, “For personal reasons, last year I chose to leave the Movement and end my membership in the Fraternity. You may ask what I’m doing here today. Last May something that may seem very commonplace happened in my life. As I was driving to a happy hour with colleagues, my car was rear-ended. The impact was quite violent, and I was brought to the hospital. The waiting period there was marvelous because something happened that led me here today. I marked the points I wanted to underline from the booklet of the Spiritual Exercises. ‘Where does all this come from? We have to understand well where this comes from, otherwise why should we return here? It comes from Christ alive.’ And then the part about the ‘place.’ Around two in the morn-



ing a doctor came to examine me. I was very afraid that there might be something seriously wrong with me. The thing I will never forget is the gaze of that doctor, who looked at me with such humanity that I wondered, 'Who are you, that you look at me this way?' A connection opened up to me: 'I am living this way of recognizing that it is not the person, that there is something in front of me that is showing me something else.' I had entered the triage area because of an accident, but I left bowled over by that gaze. In the following days, I kept thinking about that gaze and that question. At a certain point, I began calling the Movement secretariat insistently to find contacts again because I'd seen and recognized that type of gaze and I'd learned how to recognize that gaze only in the education of the Movement. What happened to me was an objective fact, something real. After the accident, people said to me, 'You have a different gaze: you're more yourself. What happened to you?' I couldn't explain it and so I began seeking out the Movement again. Why? Because I didn't want to lose what I'd encountered! I wanted to maintain that recognition and the only place that could help me was the School of Community because here I was educated to recognize Him and live Him."

Here is a person in whom Christ has conquered. "Authority absorbs all of me," we heard Fr. Giussani say—it is totalizing. I am so amazed that Christ conquers this way in a person, no matter whom, that I cannot fail to desire to give everything; I cannot avoid being entirely absorbed. Authority absorbs all of me. As one of you wrote, "My life

is a continual starting anew from the recognition of this presence, of a certain presence. Only this can give rise to enthusiasm, joy, and gladness in living. It is a presence that can obtain from me what nobody else can. Only Christ is capable of obtaining from me adherence, affection, and love without compare." Do you understand why this is the only thing that can conquer nihilism?

**Paradoxically, this being totally absorbed** does not further enslave me, but makes me finally free. Authority is "the source of freedom" and "ignites my freedom." "This man speaks with authority." But who is authority? There is a line in the third canto of Dante's *Paradiso* that is deliciously perfect: "My sight [...] turned [...] to the mark of its greater desire and bent itself wholly on Beatrice." He turned to the mark, to the face that was fuller of desire and therefore evoked the most desire in him. Authority is a new face, full of "greater desire" that evokes in us a "greater desire." Fr. Giussani wrote, "Only in encountering authority will authentic contentment begin to filter through our door, to cross the threshold of our personality: looking at that new human face, you perceive a *correspondence* with your

heart's expectations, and therefore discover contentment. Without authority there is no contentment. There will be 'satisfaction' or if you like 'pleasure' but not the human contentment of freedom, of thought, and of the heart, of the eyes and of the word" (*L'avvenimento Cristiano [The Christian event]*, Bur, Milano 2003, pp. 16-17).

Only if Christ has such a grip on us will we be able to risk like the sinful woman, who displayed the freedom of being herself right in front of everyone without letting herself be conditioned by the whisperings, opinions, or reactions of those around her. No fear held her back, no compromise with the common mind-set. She had nothing to lose. Everyone considered her a sinner, so what did she have to lose? Therefore she could have the boldness to let herself be seized to the core of her being by Christ. Not closed in her room, but in front of everyone, provoking everyone's reaction, including Jesus's. But He was not fooled: He knew who she was. Through His way of looking at her, of reacting, His unique difference appeared. Stunning. Today this freedom is crucial for educating, for taking the risk of loving without possession but with the detachment that makes

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it possible to communicate His presence without putting our humanity in the freezer, so as to not reduce Christianity to values that are “too pure and too pale” as de Lubac wrote, to magnetize and attract the interest of the center of the “I.” (*The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1995, p. 71). This is why you become a son or daughter, participating in the “family tree” that has overtaken you, the one in which you see Christ conquer. “That living family tree is my ‘T’ which is overtaken and made different by this relationship.” Daughters and sons are free to shine forth with the differentness they bear, received from an other who generates them constantly. As Saint Paul said, “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.” But how do they preach Him? “[We are] your slaves for the sake of Jesus. For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Christ. But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:5-7).

### 3. No one generates, unless he is generated now

Authority is a present paternity, as we have just heard Fr. Giussani say.

This is particularly crucial for each of us: “You can’t be a father, generator, if you have no one as your father. Not [pay attention here] if you *have not had*, but if you *don’t have* [in the present] someone as your father. Because if you have no one as father, it means there is no event, it is not an encounter, not a generation. *Generation is an action in the present.*” (L. Giussani, “Joy, Happiness and Boldness: No One Generates Unless He is Generated,” *Journey, the CL Magazine*, n. 2/1997, p. 11). You can see this from afar. Who has a father? The person who is generated now. When you visit a family, you see who is a son, who is generated in that moment and who is not; the one who is not generated defends himself and is full of fear of his father.

Now, “your attitude towards another is a permanent aspect, but the realization of paternity as the content of the permanent attitude is something present. Having a father is a permanent attitude because it belongs to your history. If in 1954 I had not entered the Berchet, but another school, my life would have been altogether different. Your attitude is permanent, but

generation – the interesting part of paternity – is presence, something in the present. So you cannot be generators unless you have a father, except in as much as you have a father, except in as much as you are being generated,” because “one who doesn’t have a father is ‘emotionally handicapped.’ Someone emotionally handicapped has had a father, but doesn’t have one in the present. Personal paternity, paternity generates the ‘I,’ or rather [...] generates not the ‘T’ itself, but the action of the ‘I.’” (Ibid., pp. 11-12.)

Therefore, Fr. Giussani concludes: “*No one generates, unless he is being generated.* Not ‘unless he has been generated,’ but ‘unless he is being generated.’ This concept of paternity is the concept that is most attacked by the whole Enlightenment culture” (ibid.), and also among us, who often belong to that mind-set.

**Consequently, in order to generate** today, for parents to generate children, and teachers to generate students, in order to begin again as it was in the beginning, in order to make a contribution in this dramatic moment of history, remembering the past does not suffice: a present paternity is needed. In order to generate today, a present presence is needed, one that cannot be reduced to the past, that expresses a “more,” something unforeseen, unforeseeable, something that did not exist before and exists now. Pope Francis said this recently to a gathering of PIME missionaries: “Evangelization is bearing witness to Jesus Christ, dead and Risen. He is the One who attracts. This is why the Church grows by attraction and not by proselytism, as Benedict XVI said” (“Address to Participants in the General Chapter of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions,” May 20, 2019). Where does this happen? Where does He attract? Where does He draw people? He attracts and draws people where they find themselves in front of a concrete presence like yours, so they ask you, “Why are you this way?” “Who is this man?” They ask it seeing you, now, in the present.

You, because of who you are, with your life, announce Jesus Christ; you make Jesus visible. As Pasolini said (quoted by Fr. Giussani) in secular terms, referring to the phenomenon of education: “You educate people with your being, not your words” (*Lettere luterane* [Lutheran letters], Einaudi, Torino 1976, p. 44). This is mission: that Christ be made visible through my person, my way of staying in reality; that is, that I bear witness to this generation that made me this

way, that made me like this, that generated me in this way, with this way of seeing and facing things: a son, a daughter, of the same family tree as the father.

A university student told me that some time ago a young worker came to live in his apartment. The young man was not a churchgoer and because of his work schedule led a fairly different life from the students, going to bed very late and never having dinner with them. So this student thought the young man was just parked there in the apartment, nothing more. But one evening a friend came to dinner and, amazed at what he was seeing, said, "What a beautiful apartment," noting things that the student had not noticed even though he lived there. At a certain point, the young worker came out of his room, surprising them, because they did not know he was there. He sat down at table with them and the guest started talking with him. The university student did not make much of it, but the next morning his friend called to tell him, "Look, that guy is really searching, you can really tell that he sees something in you." The student responded, "Well, I really don't think so ...". That very morning the university student decided to go for a swim in the river, and a bit halfheartedly asked the young worker if he wanted to come along. "Yes, I'll come." So when they got to the river, the young worker began telling him what it had meant for him to live in that apartment. "I realized right away that there was something different among you." Nobody had told him that many of them were in CL. When the young worker had moved in, in his room he had found a booklet left behind by the previous renter, *La voce unica dell'ideale* [The one voice of the ideal] (San Paolo, 2018). "I read the whole thing," he added, "and then I gave it to my brother, who is beginning his last year of high school, because he needs this thing." Then he told him, "I would like to get to know you all better," and "will you teach me to pray?" The university student concluded, "The evening before I had thought of asking the others in the house to say a prayer at the close of the evening, but then I thought better of it, since the young worker was there. I thought I should let it go and avoid it, because why would he be interested in praying? Well, obviously I didn't see something that our dinner guest had seen right away. It's a good thing he saw it, because now the openness of our guest's gaze has taken me over, too."

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*"This is the drama.  
We can fail to grasp  
what is happening now,  
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**What poverty is needed to let yourself be generated** by the most recent arrival! In fact, what is the risk we often run, as we have seen in this case? The risk of obviousness. How do we see it? From the fact that we no longer experience wonder. We see stupendous things right in front of our eyes, right under our noses, but we do not recognize them, truly realize what is happening, as it happens. We fail to see where Christ is conquering right in front of our eyes.

Even now, things that happened in the beginning happen again, as the Gospel story relates: "When He entered Capernaum, a centurion approached Him and appealed to Him, saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully.' He said to him, 'I will come and cure him.' The centurion said in reply, 'Lord, I am not worthy to have You enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it.' When Jesus heard this, He was amazed and said to those following him, 'Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.'" He sees it in a pagan! In Israel He had not found such great faith. For this reason, Jesus added, "I say to you, many will come from the east and the west [the last, the pagans], and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven but the children of the kingdom [that is, those who were called first] will be driven out."



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Not because He drives them out Himself in punishment, but because they exclude themselves, not having recognized Him. The latest to arrive, like the centurion, can recognize things that the children to whom Jesus’s announcement is destined first of all, do not recognize.

This is the drama. We “children of the kingdom,” who have eaten and drunk with Him, having participated in the life of the Christian community, can fail to grasp what is happening now, while the last to arrive see it. We lose the newness that Christ is introducing into history, not in the past, but now, the newness recognized by the last to arrive, while we are there talking about “our business,” and thus succumb to the common mind-set, succumb to the rules. We lack the sense of wonder; we succumb to the rules and the strategies, as Pope John Paul I said in the line so often quoted by Fr. Giussani: “The real drama of the Church that likes to call itself modern is the attempt to correct the wonder of the event of Christ with rules” (John Paul I, *Humilitas*, n. 3/2001, p. 10). Fr. Giussani commented, “When you no longer experience wonder [when we no longer feel wonder about anything and fail to recognize what happens as it happens, that is, the event of Christ that lights your face and causes it to emerge] [...] you cannot avoid subjecting your own life, segmented, to the slavery of rules” (*In cammino: 1992-1998*, pp. 107-108).

On the contrary, “the Christian event is an encounter with a human reality that transmits the evidence that the divine, which has bent over and entered our life, corresponds to what we are. This encounter opens my eyes upon myself, unveils me to myself, *shows that it corresponds* to what I am: *it makes me realize* what I am, what I want, because it makes me understand that what it bears is exactly what I want [...]. As if He says, ‘Look [look!] at what you are, and then tell Me if I do not correspond to you: it is only because you do not know yourself that you can believe that I do not cor-

respond to you, and that you would prefer something else as the meaning of your “I” [that is, you can get rid of Me].” (Ibid., pp. 111-112.)

Giussani warns us of the danger that always looms over us. What danger? The idea that you can develop autonomously from your father. “Bit by bit, as time goes by, the danger is that you develop the way a son does in terms of his father: he takes his own road without considering his father” and thus “the sons are no longer the sons of the father; they are momentarily disciples [what a perfect description: often we are “momentarily disciples”] in order to act. When they can act, they do so on their own [when we can act, we do so on our own, willingly doing without the father]. [...] Instead, if you are a son, you grow and add all the new things you learn to what your father told you” (Notes from the CL President’s Council, Milan, July 24, 1992, archived at the CL General Secretariat, Milan).

**This is the challenge we have before us** at the beginning of this year: to strive to perceive the presence that generates us, the authorities who conquer nihilism, a presence so exceptional that we ask, “Who is this man?”

“God loves us,” Pope Francis said recently. “He drew closer than we could have ever imagined; He took on our flesh in order to save us. This proclamation is the heart of faith. It must precede and inspire our every initiative. We exist to make this closeness palpable. But one cannot communicate closeness to God without experiencing it, without experiencing it every day” (“Address to Bishops Participating in the Course Promoted by the Congregation of Bishops and by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches,” September 12, 2019). Only by making ourselves sons and daughters, only by experiencing a paternity, can we testify to each other and communicate to those we encounter on the road the answer to the void of meaning that dominates today. ■

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