



*Communion  
and Liberation  
A Movement  
in the Church*



**Communion and Liberation**  
A Movement in the Church

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of Communion and Liberation

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# *1. What Is Communion and Liberation?*

A great friendship, stretching all over the world and rooted in the Christian faith, that helps discover the solidity of faith and its relevance for life's needs.

# 1.1

## In an Epochal Change

“Do we Christians still believe in the capacity of the faith we have received to attract those we encounter, and do we believe in the living fascination of its disarming beauty?”<sup>1</sup>

Seventy years after it began, Communion and Liberation never ceases to ask questions about the current state of Christianity. It does so with a growing openness to the horizons of the whole world and its needs: today its 100,000 members are spread over more than eighty countries, from the United States to New Zealand, from Russia to South Africa. This great friendship within the Church has as its aim educating one another to the elementary aspects of the Catholic faith, to discover its solidity and its relevance in confronting concrete problems in life. Whether one is at a university in Milan, in a slum in Kampala, on the icy tundra of Novosibirsk, in a market in Taipei, or in the frenzy of New York, the proposal of Communion and Liberation is the same: “The only possibility for faith to be seen as useful is that each one can compare it with his life; that is, that life, its

### (I). Brief Biography on p.36.

difficulties, its circumstances, which none of us are spared, can begin to be lived with a dignity, with a gratitude, and with a light that it did not have before.”<sup>2</sup>

In this spirit, Communion and Liberation faces the challenges in the present, constantly reassessing and renewing its task. We all feel the impact of the “collapse of the self-evident,”<sup>3</sup> those certainties that underpinned common life for centuries. This collapse continues to turn our lives upside down at every level: from relationships between parents and children to those between teachers and students, from attitudes toward the poor and migrants to international relations. In 1968, the founder of the movement, Fr. Luigi Giussani (I), captured the advent of a new historical age in lucid terms, pointing out that, “It is no longer history, or doctrine, or tradition, or a discourse that will move men and women today. Christian tradition and philosophy, Christian tradition and discourse have created and continue to create ‘Christianness,’ but not Christianity.”<sup>4</sup>

The current cultural landscape shows us that “Christendom no longer exists”<sup>5</sup> and that the content of Christianity no longer serves as a widely shared point of reference. This is at the heart of the pressing questions that pervade the Christian world: what is the current state of Christianity? How can it be convincing for men and women today? And what does it mean to be Christians in the midst of this “epochal change?”<sup>6</sup>

Fr. Giussani’s proposal centers around the conception of Christianity as a real, historical event that is not confined to the past, but is contemporary in our lives; it continues today. Thanks to this and through the attraction of a personal and communal experience that develops day by day, Christianity is (re)discovered as “the event of God who became man,

and who remains present in history through the changed lives of those who follow Him.”<sup>7</sup>

Witness, therefore, takes on a critical value for the Christian announcement today: the communication and the sharing of a fullness of life with full respect for each person’s freedom.

“That gets Christianity across much more than lots of other things, than all these ethical arguments, because when you see someone like that, you naturally want to ask, ‘Where does this joy come from? Where does this fullness of life come from?’ People may not immediately think that the ultimate origin of this happiness is called Jesus Christ, that it’s called faith. But when a person starts to understand that this stupefying way of living in the real world, so happy, so joyful, is rooted in the faith, he starts to get interested.”<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2

# Ecclesial Movements

**C**ommunion and Liberation is one of the more established and wide-spread Catholic lay movements that sprung up during the time of turmoil that characterized the Church in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in Vatican II. John Paul II described them as “an unexpected newness which is sometimes even disruptive,”<sup>9</sup> whose birth he saw as a “new springtime brought forth by the Spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

A diverse and multi-faceted category, a movement is, “a concrete ecclesial reality with predominantly lay membership, a faith journey and Christian witness which bases its own pedagogical method on a precise charism given to the person of the

founder in specific circumstances and ways.”<sup>11</sup> The “evangelical courage”<sup>12</sup> of their members—as Pope Francis called it—has taken form over the years into a diverse range of missionary activities: from evangelizing and translating faith for modern times to promoting peace; from education to care for the poor, migrants and others in need. “Watching them,” Benedict XVI confessed, “I had the joy and the grace to see how, at a moment of weariness in the Church, at a time when we were hearing about ‘the winter of the Church,’ the Holy Spirit was creating a new springtime, awakening in young people and adults alike the joy of being Christian.”<sup>13</sup>



## 1.3

# Life in the Movement

**A** number of gestures and events are characteristic to the path of Communion and Liberation, in addition to the insistence on participating in the liturgy and the prayer life of the Church. They are not requirements in order to consider oneself part of the movement, but are rather a proposal: each person may freely adhere.

### **School of Community.**

A time of catechesis: reading and personal meditation on a text suggested to everyone in the movement. This work is typically shared in regular meetings with a group, spontaneously formed by people in the place they live, work or study.

### **Charitable Work.**

To educate oneself to charity as the ultimate law of existence, participants are invited to dedicate their free time to serve those in need in various sectors: from assisting people with disabilities or the elderly to supporting families or individuals in poverty, the homeless, immigrants or prisoners.

### **Common Fund.**

Monetary contributions to the movement to sustain all its activities. Each member can contribute regularly in an amount freely chosen. Its purpose is as an education to poverty and to the missionary dimension of life.

### **Spiritual Exercises and Assemblies.**

According to one's stage of life (university or high school students, professionals or members of the Fraternity) and geographical location, large communal gatherings take place to mark the seasons of the liturgical year, such as Lent and Advent, or to discuss and to judge aspects of personal or community life, such as the various forms of assemblies (from the level of local communities to the leaders for each continent).

Naturally, each person or group may promote particular initiatives that are open to everyone, and they do, sometimes renewing elements from religious tradition and other times creating gestures that form a following in time. Examples include the Way of the Cross over the Brooklyn Bridge in New York (and many analogous processions that take place in dozens of cities throughout the U.S.) or the walking pilgrimages from Macerata to Loreto (which now usually draws 90,000 participants) and from Krakow to Czestochowa (in which thousands of students come together each year after completing high school or university).

## 1.4 Encounter and Constructive- ness

**T**he journey proposed by CL calls us “to live the faith not as a point of arrival, but as a wound that is never healed, making me the traveling companion of anyone I find on the road.”<sup>14</sup>

An unconditional openness to others and affirmation of all that is human bring the Christian experience within reach even for those who are ideologically or circumstantially distant. This happens in daily life, in the ordinary dynamic of social interactions as well as in a “cultural dialogue” with the contemporary world. Countless occasions for encounters with well-known figures from any provenance have been documented as true spaces of reciprocal freedom in which each shares his or her vision and way of life to offer a real contribution for everyone’s life. At whatever level this happens, it is always a journey that comes to touch on life’s deepest issues: from its most radical questions to the mystery of suffering, from the drama of social and political tensions to the tragedy of inequality and poverty. These challenges help one comprehend that, “without recovering the elementary experience that the other is not a threat, but rather a good for the realization of our ‘I,’ it will be difficult to emerge from the crisis of human, social and political relationships in which we find ourselves.”<sup>15</sup>

Anyone, no matter the condition he finds himself in, can be a seed of encounter or constructiveness.

## 1.5 An Ecumenism of Experience

**F**urther relationships blossom with those who belong to other Christian communities: from the broad realm of Orthodoxy to Anglicans in the United Kingdom and representatives of various denominations in Europe and in the U.S. This “ecumenism of experience” that also embraces figures from other religions (as well as agnostics or non-believers) has been documented by the intense and deep friendship between Fr. Giussani himself and professor Shodo Habukawa, the leader of Monte Koya Buddhist monastery (Japan), by the unceasing dialogue with Jewish leaders and thinkers, and by the progress in a human and cultural exchange with representatives of the Islamic world that has come to involve institutions such as the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt, Al Azhar University, and the Muslim World League.

Without being preoccupied by a “strategy,” Communion and Liberation conceives of this dimension of dialogue as “a space for reciprocal witness that is capable of embracing those who are different than you with human gestures that change hearts.”<sup>16</sup>

# 1.6

## The Three Dimensions of Faith

### 1. Culture.

The encounter with Christ is only recognized as something reasonable and humanly advantageous if it intersects with life's needs: "the true cultural, Christian dimension finds expression in the *comparison* between the truth of His person and our life in all of its implications."<sup>17</sup>

Not censoring any of humanity or human questions, the Christian experience becomes a curious and critical approach ready to acknowledge the value in any experience and glimpse any possibility for enrichment.

### 2. Charity.

Christianity empowers the human "need to be interested in others," revealing the origin of that need: "the ultimate law of being and of life: charity. The supreme law of our being is to share in the being of others, to live in communion."<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Mission.

The concern for the needs of humanity has no borders: "The endpoints of Christ's call are the extreme ends of the earth, right to the end of the world."<sup>19</sup>

This calls us back to mission as a change of mentality: leaving behind the idea of a bourgeois life, comfortable but arid, to live each moment and each place constantly reaching out to others, with an awareness of serving the world and all of history.

## 1.7

# The Organization

**B**elonging to Communion and Liberation is very simple. “The desire to participate in the movement usually arises because people find in another person something that interests them. This is the same dynamic that happened at the beginning of Christianity.”<sup>20</sup> Anyone can freely take part in it and freely stop. There are no formalities to complete. Even the invitation to sign up for School of Community each year is not a condition to be able to participate in meetings. Each community refers to the local Church and sees their diocesan bishops as a point of reference. Communities spread organically, for the most part by city in the places ordinary life unfolds (schools, universities, workplaces, neighborhoods, etc.). Most members are laypeople; some are consecrated,

religious or priests. The priests, whether diocesan or missionaries, keep the pastoral assignments their bishops or superiors have given to them; they may only take on responsibilities for the movement with permission.

At the central level, there is a Presidential Council made up of about thirty people from different countries who collaborate with the President in guiding the movement. At the local level, a group called the “Diaconia” supports the local leader in guiding the community. All of these offices are carried out without pay. The movement’s activities are completely self-financed using the Common Fund. “This is fundamental: we do not depend on any other resource than what the members freely give. We are free from any institution and any form of financing.”<sup>21</sup>

## 2. *From Its Origins to Today*

In 1954, Fr. Luigi Giussani's educational adventure began. The exciting journey has continued over a 70-year history made up of encounters, surprises, difficulties, and discoveries.

## 2.1

# On the Train

**W**e find ourselves in the mid-1950s. Fr. Luigi Giussani, a priest from the diocese of Milan, is on a train to the Adriatic Coast for a long vacation. He casually runs into a group of students and starts talking with them. He found them “so unfamiliar with the most elementary things” about Christianity that he was filled with “overwhelming desire to introduce them to the things that I had met.”<sup>22</sup> That “little episode”<sup>23</sup> was destined to radically change his life. As Fr. Giussani was a promising theologian, his superiors had planned a career as an academic for him, starting in the seminary of Venegono. Instead, he obtained permission to dedicate himself completely to the education of young people, teaching in a public high school. At the time, Italy appeared to be a deeply Catholic country with churches full, associations flourishing and the Christian Democratic Party a force in national politics. In the eyes of Fr. Giussani, however, Christianity was already in a deep crisis. The Church, in particular, “was clearly still a solid and rooted presence, thanks to its past, but its import and its solidity were based, more than anything else,” on the “participation of the

masses in Catholic worship, often out of inertia,” and, on the other hand, on “a strictly political power.”<sup>24</sup> Conversing with young people, Fr. Giussani understood that, in reality, for them “Christianity was no longer an extraordinary adventure capable of giving relish to all of life, but rather a set of behavioral norms, institutions and moral codes. Something respectable, yes, but not the bearer of the secret to the most authentic and radical human happiness.”<sup>25</sup> This led to an intuition: “perhaps what is needed [...] is someone who can explain the contents of the faith to them in a [...] reasonable way,” in a way “that corresponds to the original needs of their human nature.”<sup>26</sup> Fr. Giussani saw the commitment to the education of young people as an urgent priority, and in October 1954 he first walked through the doors of Berchet High School in Milan to teach Religion. His educational activities initially took place in the context of Catholic Action, in that branch dedicated to high school students called *Gioventù Studentesca* or “Student Youth.” As years passed, the activities flourished to the point of many young people looking for ways to continue the same journey of faith once they graduated.

## 2.2

# Crisis and Creativity

Then the year 1968 hit; the student revolution exploded in Italy. Most of the young people participating with Fr. Giussani abandoned him to join the contestation. But it was also the time when a flyer entitled “Communion and Liberation” was circulated around several Milan universities. The authors were a group of students who remained faithful to the experience they began with Fr. Giussani. Recognizing how they were united to the protestors by the shared aspiration to “create a more human humanity,” they affirmed that the freedom everyone is seeking can only be found in communion. “Only the communion that God made possible with Himself through Christ, only the communion among the people who recognize this can, as it expands, create an oasis of a truer humanity.”<sup>27</sup> In the midst of the tumultuous years that began in 1968, Communion and Liberation continued and renewed the experience that had begun 15 years before in a Milanese high school. The university world became the heart of the life of the movement. These were turbulent years for young people, during which extremist groups made themselves the arbiters of “political exercise” within society. Social tensions and ideological clashes, which often resulted in violence that did not spare the CL community, characterized the context in Italy and culminated in the terrorism of the so-called “Years of Lead.” In their commitment to live

and build up the life of the Church wherever they were, CL students found themselves affirming the dignity of their experience and fighting for freedom of thought and of expression in the public square; not only for Christians but for everyone. In time, various forms of engaging emerged, animated by the conviction that the Christian faith has to do with every aspect of existence. Young people interested in building at a social and political level founded the Popular Movement; others started radio shows and newspapers or sought to respond to the needs of their classmates through *Cooperativa Universitaria Studio e Lavoro* (CUSL), a student cooperative. Others started a network of volunteering and international relief (which later evolved into the NGO AVSI), or started to share in the experience of welcoming children who were alone or at risk. Some members helped contribute to a culture of dialogue, creating the Meeting for Friendship Amongst Peoples; others nurtured a Christian approach to work and business with the Companionship of Works (*Compagnia delle Opere-CdO*). To prevent food waste and redistribute excess food to the poor and disadvantaged families, the *Banco Alimentare* food bank was formed. A season of great creativity in social initiatives stretched from the end of the '70s through the next decade, which also coincided with the establishment of a close relationship with Pope John Paul II. The movement, which at this point had been proven its solidity as an entity fully inserted in the fabric of the Church, received recognition of the Fraternity of CL by the Holy See in 1982.

## 2.3

# Rediscovery of the Charism

This marked the beginning of the Movement's path to full maturity. In the following years, Fr. Giussani was invited to the 1987 Synod on the laity and made important trips to the Holy Land and to Japan, where he met with the monks of Monte Koya, adherents to "shingon" Buddhism. In addition, several religious communities (II) were formed including the *Memores Domini* and the Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo. In 1991, Fr. Giussani started to show the first symptoms of Parkinson's Disease, an illness that would bring him increasingly burdensome pain up to his death and force him to gradually decrease his travel. In 1998, he spoke at the gathering of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities with John Paul II. He died in 2005 and his funeral liturgy was celebrated at the Duomo in Milan by then-Cardinal and Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the faith, Joseph Ratzinger, as the Pope's personal delegate. Well before his death, Fr. Giussani

(II). More information on p.19.

(III). Brief biography on p.37.

indicated his successor, Fr. Julián Carrón (III), a diocesan priest from Madrid. They had met through the years of friendship between Communion and Liberation and the Spanish youth movement *Nueva Tierra*. As the president of the Fraternity of CL (now confirmed in multiple elections) Fr. Carrón guides the entire Movement to rediscover Fr. Giussani's charism in the face of new social challenges, from the 2008 economic crisis to the terrorist attacks that plagued Europe, to the eruption of the Covid-19 epidemic in 2020.

Fr. Carrón leaves the Presidency in November 2021, following the publication of the General Decree, *The Associations of the Faithful*, issued by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, which provides for a time limit of ten years on the term of office of the President. Pending the revision of the Statutes of the Fraternity of CL, on the advice of the same Dicastery, the Vice-President, Davide Prospero, assumes the *interim* Presidency.



## 2.4

# Go Into the Whole World

**B**eginning in the '80s, CL became an increasingly international organization. "‘Go into the whole world’ (Mt 28:19) is what Christ said to his disciples. And I repeat to you: ‘Go into all the world and bring the truth, the beauty, and the peace which are found in Christ the Redeemer.’"<sup>28</sup> These words from John Paul II in 1984 were the final push for the spread of Communion and Liberation, which is now present in over 80 countries throughout the world. Europe is home to the some of the largest communities. In Spain, second by numbers only to Italy, the community has spread throughout the country. Members are present in schools and universities, and engaged in social and cultural discourse, for example through the annual festival Encuentro Madrid. Just as significant is the community that began in the '80s in Poland, in part through a friendship with the movement Light and Life, and the solicitousness of young people in CL for the social foment that preceded the fall of the Berlin wall.

More recently, CL communities have begun to grow in Anglo-Saxon countries, mostly originating with young Italians who relocated for work.

On December 11, 1997, the English edition of Fr. Giussani's *The Religious Sense* was presented at the United Nations in New York. The event propelled the spread of Communion and Liberation's publications and the spread of the Movement all over the United States. The resulting community gives life to experiences including Crossroads Cultural Center and the annual festival New York Encounter.

The presence of the Movement in Latin America has a long history, beginning in Brazil in the early '60s at the encouragement of Fr. Giussani, and later rooted all over the continent, from Chile to Venezuela and up to Mexico. Countless non-profit centers or schools have risen up in many countries, sometimes in collaboration with other organizations, for example Association Sem Terra founded by Cleuza e Marcos Zerbini in Sao

Paolo and the APAC Federation, an extraordinary model for a prison without guards. Annual cultural events are organized in Mexico, Chile and Brazil.

In Uganda, many members dedicate their time to serve the inhabitants of the Kampala slums through Meeting Point International, a center to support women living with AIDS, and three schools spanning elementary up to professional education. Analogous initiatives in the sectors of education, assistance and healthcare exist in Burundi, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Kenya (home to the largest community in Africa by the numbers) and Nigeria. A relationship between the Movement and the Orthodox Church formed long ago, as evidenced by the growth of ecumenical communities in Russia and Ukraine. It is part of a history of friendship that continues today, bringing life to centers for research and cultural dialogue, for example the Library of the Spirit in Moscow and Centro Russia Cristiana. These are just a few examples of a life that, from Europe, passing through the U.S., is now also shared in communities as distant as Kazakhstan, Japan, Taiwan and Australia. With a lively and solid presence that grows organically, Communion and Liberation has “never made plans for expansion. The way the Movement has ended up expanding is, then, not the fruit of a specific initiative, but rather of the development and—I would say—miracle of encounters and personal relationships,”<sup>29</sup> primarily facilitated by opportunities to work or to study abroad.

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## Overview of the countries where CL is present

### **Africa:**

Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tunisia, Uganda.

### **Americas:**

Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Perù, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela.

### **Asia:**

Azerbaijan, China, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Oman, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam.

### **Europe:**

Albania, Austria, Belgium, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Ukraine.

### **Oceania:**

Australia, New Zealand.

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# *3. Lay and Religious Associations*

A number of lay and religious associations have been born out of the experience of people who, in encountering Fr. Giussani, perceived new or renewed forms of sharing the Christian vocation as laypeople, religious or priests.

## 3.1 Fraternity of Communion and Liberation

A Universal Association of the Faithful, recognized on February 11, 1982, by the then-Pontifical Council for the Laity. Members include laypeople, priests, religious and consecrated men and women who recognize the path of Communion and Liberation as the most fitting road for them to go deeper in the Catholic faith and to serve the Church. To be admitted, each member of the Fraternity is simply asked to seriously commit to participate in a few moments of spiritual formation each year (spiritual exercises, a retreat in Advent and one in Lent). The Fraternity of CL is led by a Central Diaconia, in cooperation with a President who is elected every six years in a process regulated by the Association's Statutes. Since September 2021, following the entry into force of the General Decree, *The Associations of the Faithful*, issued by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, the Fraternity of CL has been involved in the revision of its Statutes.

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## 3.2 Memores Domini

A group of lay men and women in CL who pursue a vocation of total dedication to God while living in the world. The pillars of the life of the *Memores Domini* are contemplation, understood as tending toward the continual memory of Christ, and mission, the passion to carry the Christian announcement into the lives of all men and women, primarily through one's professional occupation. Recognized by the Holy See on December 8, 1988, as a Universal Private Ecclesial Association, the *Memores Domini* are present in 35 countries. They live in community, grouped into "houses," practicing the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and virginity. Since September 2021, the Association has been led by His Excellency Monsignor Filippo Santoro, Pontifical Delegate, Archbishop of Taranto.

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### 3.3

## Priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo (FSCB)

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In 1989, Cardinal Ugo Poletti recognized the Fraternity as a Society of Apostolic Life and, ten years later, John Paul II elevated it to an Institute of Pontifical Right. “Fraternity” and “mission” are the guiding words of this young community: serving men and women with the availability to go wherever the needs of the Church and the life of the movement require the presence of priests, carrying the experience of CL throughout the world “through a priestly missionary energy,” as its founder Massimo Camisasca, now Bishop of Reggio Emilia, wrote.

On February 1, 2013, the general assembly elected Fr. Paolo Sottopietra as the new Superior General. Today, the Fraternity is present with around 140 definitive members who work in 18 countries around the world.

Inspired by the experience of the Fraternity of St. Charles, the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo were recognized in 2007 as an Association of the Faithful by Bishop Gino Reali.

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### 3.4

## Sisters of Charity of the Assumption

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A Religious Institute of Pontifical Right generated through the encounter of the charism of French Assumptionist Fr. Stefano Pernet—who, in the 1800s, founded an innovative initiative for working families, providing concrete services including care for the sick and for children, giving the Church a present face in a world that no longer knew her—and the charism of Fr. Giussani. Giussani met Fr. Pernet’s Sisters in Milan in the ’50s and found they resonated with him. He directed many vocations to them and accompanied and supported them his whole life, especially in the post-Conciliar difficulties. In 1993, the new Institute was formed, with Giussani as the co-founder. Today, the sisters number around 100, are present in the major Italian cities and Madrid, and continue the same mission as at their origin: serving families in difficulty to “rebuild the people of God” within the conditions of our current social situation.

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## 3.5 Monastery of Saints Peter and Paul

Cascinazza  
(Buccinasco, Milano)

Founded in 1971 through the inspiration of Abbot Bernardo Cignitti as an attempt for a renewal of Benedictine life following the indications of the Second Vatican Council. The content of his proposal had as its scope a rediscovery of the Christian event as the heart of Benedictine monastic life: the unity found in Christ within a fraternal community in which communion is lived, suffered, and made anew each day.

In 1990, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini—having received permission from the Holy See—erected it as a Priory *sui iuris* of diocesan right, approving its Constitutions.

Along this path, the discrete and faithful friendship of Fr. Giussani has been important from the beginning: the impact of his witness of a constantly renewed faith prompted a deeper rediscovery of the Benedictine charism and helped root the community in that charism. In 2020, the monastic community consists of 22 monks who work for their living (agricultural activities, production of beer, honey and derived goods). In recent years, the growth of the community has inspired plans to expand the physical plant to create more space for monks and for guests.

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## 3.6 Fraternity of St. Joseph

Made up of people in the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation who recognize they are called to live virginity within the existing circumstances of their lives, following the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty, and virginity. This dedication to Christ draws nourishment from remaining within Fr. Giussani's charism, and is sustained by the reception of the sacraments, a diligent personal prayer life and participation in periodic community gestures (meetings, retreats, spiritual exercises).

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# *4. Christians At Work*

Faith pervades and animates every aspect of life, putting a person's freedom and responsibility into play. As a consequence, organizations and initiatives in every realm of social life have sprung up.

## 4.1

# Desire to Serve

The Christian experience enhances one's desire to serve the world as well as the desire to express one's social creativity. In a continuous flux of inventiveness, members of Communion and Liberation engage at a personal level or as a group in the most varied realms of the life of the *polis* (from economics to charity and social responsibility, from education to culture) creating associations, solidarity-based entities, foundations, schools, cooperatives, NGOs, enterprises, cultural events, communities for welcome and recovery, centers for professional development and places for social integration. These are what are later defined with the word "works," initiatives born out of and "managed through the personal responsibility of the adults who started them,"<sup>30</sup> without any involvement of the movement as an institution. The aim of Communion and Liberation is not, in fact, to organize structures or plan

initiatives, but rather to educate the personal faith of its members, a faith that pervades and animates every aspect of life, permanently setting in motion a freedom of initiative, a care for the common good and a passion to share with others.

The Fraternity promoted the creation of the **Fondazione Sacro Cuore di Milano** ([sacrocuore.org](http://sacrocuore.org)), an academic institute. Fr. Giussani desired to have as an example of a path of Christian education. He nominated most of the members of its administrative board. With regards to engagement in the public square, Communion and Liberation is not politically affiliated in any way. Some members of CL have undertaken political careers in various parties in virtue of their personal decisions, in no way attributed to the movement. Initiatives created or animated by CL members are present in many countries around the world and work in wide-ranging fields. A number of examples follow.



## 4.2

# Fight Against Poverty

**T**he **Banco Alimentare**, an Italian food bank, ([bancoalimentare.it](http://bancoalimentare.it)) serves 7,500 charitable organizations. Recovery of excess food, education on giving and distribution to those in need are the pillars of its activities in service to the common good. Analogously, **Fondazione Banco Farmaceutico**, the “Pharmaceutical Bank Foundation” ([bancofarmaceutico.org](http://bancofarmaceutico.org)) connects non-profits, pharmacists, pharmaceutical and logistics companies, volunteers and citizens to recover and to provide medicines free of charge to those living in poverty. Each year, these two entities organize one-day special collections that involve thousands of volunteers at a national level. They are, respectively, the *Giornata della Colletta Alimentare* and the *Giornata della Raccolta del Farmaco*. The related **Federation of Solidarity Banks** is made up of associations directly engaged in distributing food to families and individuals facing serious financial difficulties. In the United States, **One City Mission** ([onecitymission.nyc](http://onecitymission.nyc)) assists the homeless living in Manhattan; and **Casa San Antonio** in Madrid ([casadesanantonio.es](http://casadesanantonio.es)) distributes food to families in need, offers job placement support and shelter for the homeless. In Cameroon, the **Edimar Association** ([edimar.skyrock.com](http://edimar.skyrock.com)) welcomes street children and adolescents.

## 4.3

# Welcoming, Recovery, Education

**T**he experience of fostering and adopting children is one of the most demanding forms of love, as testified by the **Families for Hospitality** network ([famiglieperaccoglienza.it](http://famiglieperaccoglienza.it)), which spans various countries. **Meeting Point International** ([meetingpoint-int.org](http://meetingpoint-int.org)) is committed to caring for and accompanying women affected by HIV in the slums of Kampala in Uganda. In Ukraine, **Emmaus** ([emmaus.com.ua](http://emmaus.com.ua)) supports young people with disabilities, orphans and displaced children, along with their families. **FDP - Protagonists in Education** ([fdpsr.ro](http://fdpsr.ro)) works in Romania, with a particular focus on children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Romania, some of whom were granted an audience with Pope Francis in January 2018. In Lithuania, **Sotas** ([sotas.org](http://sotas.org)) organizes social inclusion activities and social-educational initiatives to help children, teens and families in need or at risk. In Paraguay, **Casa Virgen de Caacupè** is a home for young people destined for alternatives to juvenile detention centers. In the United States, **Los Angeles Habilitation House** ([lahabilitationhouse.org](http://lahabilitationhouse.org)) offers professional formation and rehabilitation for veterans and

those with disabilities. **Trabajo y Persona** ([trabajoypersona.org](http://trabajoypersona.org)) is active in Venezuela with projects to promote a healthy work culture and professional development courses for young people and women in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In Kazakhstan, the **Alfa & Omega** center allowed for the creation of two associations: a local NGO, **MASP** that develops projects starting from the social needs it encounters and the “**Di Più**” center dedicated to promoting the Italian language and other cultural initiatives. In Brazil, **Escola Agricola Rainha Dos Apostolos** ([escolaagricolamanaus.org.br](http://escolaagricolamanaus.org.br)) teaches sustainable agriculture to the children of small farmers or producers in the Amazon region.

The Italian association **Cometa** ([puntocometa.org](http://puntocometa.org)) is made up of a group of families dedicated to welcoming, educating and forming children and adolescents and supporting their loved ones. In Turin and Catania, **Piazza dei Mestieri** ([piazzaeimestieri.it](http://piazzaeimestieri.it)) works in the field of rehabilitation for troubled youth and job preparedness. **Portofranco** ([portofranco.org](http://portofranco.org)) is a center for free tutoring and after school programs for middle school students which

started in Milan and, over time, became the model for myriad analogous initiatives throughout Italy; now points of reference to prevent school drop-out, as well as places of friendship between Italian and foreign-born students, thereby creating paths for authentic social and cultural integration.

**Imprevisto** ([imprevisto.net](http://imprevisto.net)) works in the field of recovery for drug addicts. **Cilla** ([cilla.it](http://cilla.it)) organizes hospitality for the sick and their families.

Numerous experiences to support or assist prisoners exist, for example the **Cooperativa Giotto** in Padua ([coopgiotto.org](http://coopgiotto.org)) an initiative that uses work inside the prison as an opportunity for rehabilitation.

Engagement in the field of education is at a massive scale, as Fr. Giussani always reserved a special place for education, leaving a mark on many members of Communion and Liberation. This can be seen in countless initiatives, from leading and promoting **professional associations** for educators to the creation of and management of **schools** scattered all over Italy and abroad, from Spain to the Netherlands, from Colombia to Chile, and from Uganda to Kenya and Nigeria.

## 4.4

# Economics and International Cooperation

In the broad landscape of non-governmental organizations, dozens of projects all over the world are managed by entities such as **AVSI – the Association of Volunteers for International Service** ([avsi.org](http://avsi.org)) and **CESAL** ([cesal.org](http://cesal.org)).

To promote a way of doing business guided by Catholic social doctrine and the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, the **Compagnia delle Opere** “Companionship of Works” - **CdO** ([cdo.org](http://cdo.org)) organizes events and initiatives for reciprocal exchange at various levels. Business owners, non-profit organizations, managers and professionals accompany one other in confronting the complexities of the economic context. With an analogous scope, **CdO Opere educative** “Educational Initiatives” ([foe.it](http://foe.it)) directs its activities toward schools and academic institutions, and **CdO Opere sociali** “Social Initiatives” ([cdooperesociali.org](http://cdooperesociali.org)) offers a platform for organizations providing social services. The **Foundation for Subsidiarity** ([sussidiarieta.net](http://sussidiarieta.net)) conducts research, offers professional development, and oversees publications, seminars and conventions on topics such as education and human capital, subsidiarity and the state, cooperation and poverty, welfare and employment, enterprise and innovation.

## 4.5

# Culture and Dialogue

A passion to go deeper into the problems and issues facing today’s world animates a number of events and cultural centers. The most celebrated is the **Meeting for Friendship Amongst Peoples** ([meetingrimini.org](http://meetingrimini.org)) attended by hundreds of thousands of guests each year and featuring exhibits, theatrical and musical performances, witnesses and panel discussions with prominent figures from the political, economic, scientific and religious realms. Following the same model are: **Encuentro Madrid** ([encuentromadrid.com](http://encuentromadrid.com)), **New York Encounter** ([newyorkencounter.org](http://newyorkencounter.org)), **Rhein Meeting** ([rhein-meeting.org](http://rhein-meeting.org)), **Meeting Lisboa** ([meetinglisboa.org](http://meetinglisboa.org)), **Rio Encontros** ([rioencontros.org.br](http://rioencontros.org.br)), **Encuentro Santiago** in Chile, **Encuentro Coatza** in Mexico. In Italy, the **Association of Cultural Centers** ([centriculturali.org](http://centriculturali.org)) is a network of around 200 local organizations committed to enriching and promoting culture. In Moscow, the **Library of the Spirit** ([pokrovka27.com](http://pokrovka27.com)), the fruit of collaboration between Catholics and Orthodox, is certainly a hub of intellectual life in the Russian capital. In the United States, the **Crossroads** network ([crossroadsculturalcenter.org](http://crossroadsculturalcenter.org)), which spans several cities, enlivens American public discourse.



# *5. The Popes and CL*

From Paul VI to Francis: a brief anthology of excerpts taken from speeches and messages directed to the movement over the years.

## 5.1

# Paul VI

Address to Florentine  
University Students  
of Communion and  
Liberation, December 28,  
1977

Be glad! Our best wishes go out to you! We are very attentive to the affirmations of your program that you are spreading about, of your way of life, of the youthful and new, renewed, and renewing adherence to the Christian and social ideals the Catholic environment of Italy gives you. We bless you and in doing so we bless and salute your founder, Fr. Giussani. We thank you for the courageous, strong, and loyal statements that you are making in this particularly agitated moment, disturbed by certain torments and misunderstandings that surround you. Be happy, be faithful, be strong, and be glad to carry with you the testimony that the Christian faith is strong, is happy, is beautiful, and can truly transform, in love and with love, the society in which it finds itself. Many, many good wishes and blessings!

## 5.2

# John Paul II

To the Movement  
“Communion and  
Liberation” on the  
30th anniversary of its  
founding, September 29,  
1984

[...] To work so that the content of the faith becomes understanding and pedagogy of life is the daily task of the believer, which must be carried out in every situation and environment in which they are called to live. And the richness of your participation in ecclesial life lies in this: a method of education in the faith so that it may influence the life of man and history; in the sacraments, so that they bring about an encounter with the Lord, and in Him with the brethren; in prayer, so that it be an invocation and praise of God in authority, so that it be a guard and guarantor of the authenticity of the ecclesial path.

The Christian experience so understood and lived generates a presence which places the Church in every human situation as the place where the event of Christ, ‘a stumbling-block to the Jews... foolishness for the pagans’ (1 Cor 1:23-24), lives as a horizon full of truth for man. We believe in Christ, dead and risen, in Christ present here and now, who alone can change and changes man and

the world, by transfiguring them. Your presence, ever more numerous and significant in the life of the Church in Italy and in various nations in which your experience is beginning to spread, is due to this certainty which you must deepen and communicate, because it is this certainty that moves mankind. It is significant in this regard, and it should be noted, how the Spirit, in order to continue with the man of today that dialogue begun by God in Christ and continued in the course of all Christian history, has raised up many ecclesial movements in the contemporary Church. They are a sign of the freedom of forms in which the one Church is expressed, and they represent a secure newness, which still awaits being adequately understood in all its positive efficacy for the Kingdom of God at work in the present moment of history. [...] “Go out into the whole world (Mt 28:19) is what Christ said to his disciples. And I repeat to you: “Go into all the world and bring the truth, the beauty, and the peace which are found in Christ the Redeemer”. This invitation that Christ made to all his followers and which Peter has the duty ceaselessly to renew, is already interwoven with your history. In these thirty years you have been open to the most varied situations, casting the seed of the presence of your movement. I know that you have put down roots in eighteen nations in the world: in Europe, in Africa, in America, and I know also the insistency with which your presence is sought in other countries. Take on the burden of this ecclesial need: this is the charge I leave with you today.

## 5.3

# Benedict XVI

Address to participants  
in the pilgrimage  
organized by the  
Fraternity of Communion  
and Liberation, March 24,  
2007

[...] My first thought goes to your Founder, Mons. Luigi Giussani, to whom many memories bind me and who became a true friend of mine. [...] Through him, the Holy Spirit raised in the Church a movement, yours, that would witness to the beauty of being Christian in an age when the opinion was spreading that Christianity is a difficult and oppressive way to live. Fr. Giussani then committed himself to awaken in youth the love for Christ, “Way, Truth and Life”, repeating that only he is the way towards the fulfilment of the deepest desires of the human heart, and that Christ does not save us regardless of our humanity, but through it.

As I was able to recall in his funeral homily, this courageous priest, who grew up in a home poor in bread but rich in music, as he himself liked to say, from the beginning was touched, or rather wounded, by the desire for beauty, though not any sort of beauty. He sought Beauty itself, the infinite Beauty which is found in Christ. In addition, how can I fail to recall the many encounters and contacts of Fr. Giussani with my Venerable Predecessor John Paul II?

On an anniversary dear to you, the Pope still wants yet again to repeat that the original pedagogical intuition of Communion and Liberation lies in reproposing the Christian event within contemporary culture in a fascinating and harmonious way, perceived as a font of new values and able to orient one’s entire existence. The event that changed the life of the Founder has also “wounded” a great many of his spiritual sons and daughters, and has given way to multiple religious and ecclesial experiences which form the history of your vast and well-organized spiritual Family. Communion and Liberation is a community experience of faith, born in the Church not by the will of an organized hierarchy but originating from a renewed encounter with Christ and thus, we can say, by an impulse derived ultimately from the Holy Spirit. Still today, it offers a profound way of life and it actualizes the Christian faith, both in a total fidelity and communion with the Successor of Peter and with the Pastors who assure the governing of the Church and through spontaneity and freedom that permit new and



prophetic, apostolic and missionary achievements.

Dear Friends, your movement is thus inserted into that vast flowering of associations, movements and new ecclesial realities providentially raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church after the Second Vatican Council. Every gift of the Spirit is found originally and necessarily at the service of the edification of the Body of Christ, offering a witness of the immense charity of God for the life of each person. The reality of ecclesial movements, therefore, is a sign of the fecundity of the Lord's Spirit, because it manifests in the world the victory of the Risen Christ and it accomplishes the missionary mandate entrusted to the whole Church. In the Message to the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements, 27 May 1998, the Servant of God John Paul II had this to say: that there is no conflict or opposition in the Church between the institutional and the charismatic dimensions, of which the Movements are a significant expression. Both are co-essential to the divine constitution of the People of God. In the Church the essential

institutions are also charismatic and indeed the charisms must, in one way or another, be institutionalized to have coherency and continuity.

Hence, both dimensions originate from the same Holy Spirit for the same Body of Christ, and together they concur to make present the mystery and the salvific work of Christ in the world.

This explains the attention with which the Pope and the Pastors look upon the richness of the charismatic gifts in the contemporary age.

In regard to this, during a recent meeting with the clergy and the parish priests of Rome, recalling the invitation that St Paul addressed in the First Letter to the Thessalonians not to extinguish the charisms, I said that if the Lord gives us new gifts, we must be grateful, even if sometimes they may be uncomfortable. At the same time, since the Church is one, if the Movements are really gifts of the Holy Spirit, they must, naturally, be inserted into the Ecclesial Community and serve it so that, in patient dialogue with the Pastors, they can be elements in the construction of the Church of today and tomorrow. [...]

## 5.4

# Francis

### Address to the Movement Communion and Liberation, March 7, 2015

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[...] I am grateful to Don Giussani for different reasons. The first and more personal is the good that this man did for me and for my priestly life, through the reading of his books and articles. The other reason is that his thoughts are deeply human and reach the most intimate yearning of mankind. You know how important the experience of encounter was to Don Giussani: the encounter not with an idea, but with a Person, with Jesus Christ. Thus he educated in freedom, leading to the encounter with Christ, because Christ gives us true freedom. Speaking about the encounter brings to mind “The calling of St Matthew”, the Caravaggio in the Church of St Louis of the French, which I used to spend much time in front of every time I came to Rome. None of them who were there, including Matthew, greedy for money, could believe the message in that finger pointing at him, the message in those eyes that looked at him with mercy and chose him for the *sequela*. He felt this astonishment of the encounter. The encounter with Christ who comes and invites us is like this.

Everything in our life, today as in the time of Jesus, begins with an encounter. An encounter with this Man, the carpenter from Nazareth, a man like all men and at the same time different. Let us consider the Gospel of John, there where it tells of the disciples’ first encounter with Jesus (cf. 1:35-42). Andrew, John, Simon: they feel themselves being looked at to their very core, intimately known, and this generates surprise in them, an astonishment which immediately makes them feel bonded to Him.... Or when, after the Resurrection, Jesus asks Peter: “Do you love me?” (Jn 21:15), and Peter responds: “Yes”; this yes was not the result of a power of will, it did not come only by decision of the man Simon: it came even before from Grace, it was that “*primarear*”, that preceding of Grace. This was the decisive discovery for St Paul, for St Augustine, and so many other saints: Jesus Christ is always first, He *primareas* us, awaits us, Jesus Christ always precedes us; and when we arrive, He has already been waiting. He is like the almond

blossom: the one that blooms first, and announces the arrival of spring. [...] After 60 years, the original charism has not lost its youthfulness and vitality. However, remember that the center is not the charism, the center is one alone, it is Jesus, Jesus Christ! When I place at the center my spiritual method, my spiritual journey, my way of fulfilling it, I go off the itinerary. All spirituality, all charisms in the Church must be “decentralized”: at the center there is only the Lord! For this reason, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, when Paul speaks of charisms, of this most beautiful reality of the Church, of the Mystical Body, he ends by speaking of love, of that which comes from God, which is truly God’s, and which allows us to imitate Him. Never forget this, to be decentralized! Thus the charism is not preserved in a bottle of distilled water! Faithfulness to the charism does not mean “to petrify it” — the devil is the one who “petrifies”, do not forget!

Faithfulness to the charism does not mean to write it on a parchment and frame it. The reference to the legacy that Don Giussani left you cannot be reduced to a museum of records, of decisions taken, of the rules of conduct. It certainly entails faithfulness to tradition, but faithfulness to tradition, Mahler said, “is not to worship the ashes but to pass on the flame”. Don Giussani would never forgive you if you lost the liberty and transformed yourselves into museum guides or worshippers of ashes. Pass on the flame of the memory of that first encounter and be free! Like this, centered in Christ and in the Gospel, you can be the arms, hands, feet, mind and heart of a Church “which goes forth”. The way of the Church is to leave her walls behind and go in search of those who are distant, on the peripheries, to serve Jesus in every person who is marginalized, abandoned, without faith, disappointed by the Church, a prisoner of one’s own selfishness. [...]



## Biographical Notes

# Servant of God Fr. Luigi Giussani

(1922–2005)



*Born in Desio (Milan) on October 15, 1922. He attended the seminary of Milan and completed his studies in the Theological Faculty of Venegono. He was ordained a priest in 1945. He left a teaching position in the seminary and taught for twelve years (1954-1966) at the classical high school "Liceo Berchet." From 1965 to 1990, he taught Introduction to Theology at Sacro Cuore Catholic University of Milan. John Paul II named him a Monsignor with the title of Honorary Prelate of His Holiness (1983), and appointed him as a Consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Laity (1987) and to the Congregation for the Clergy (1994). In 1995, he was awarded the International Catholic Culture Prize. He died on February 22, 2005. On February 22, 2012, the request to open the cause for his beatification and canonization was announced. Then Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Angelo Scola, accepted the case.*

# Fr. Julián Carrón

*Born on February 25, 1950 in Navoconcejo (Spain). He attended the Conciliar Seminary of Madrid and was ordained a priest in 1975. He has been a lecturer at Complutense University of Madrid and Élève Titulaire at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem. Since 2004, he has taught Introduction to Theology at Sacro Cuore Catholic University of Milan. He is the author of various publications translated into numerous languages, and participates in conferences and discussions around the world. He has been the leader of the Movement and President of the Fraternity of CL from 2005 to 2021.*









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