

A LEAP OF SELF-AWARENESS

**Notes from Fr. Julián Carrón's Synthesis
at the Assembly for Leaders
of Communion and Liberation in Italy
Pacengo di Lazise (Verona), March 11, 2018.**

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*Haja o que houver
Canzone di Maria Chiara*

“The facts, before our eyes; the volumes, in our hands” (St. Augustine, Sermon 360/B, 20: *Sermo sancti Augustini cum pagani ingrederentur*). Right now, the clearest sign we have of whether the facts that demonstrate Christ’s living presence are before our eyes or not is the way we recited the Psalms (the “volumes”). With the facts before our eyes, the Psalms speak to us with a depth and a richness that we otherwise miss. Psalm 45, which we just recited, is almost a perfect synthesis of everything we’ve said and lived the last two days. Just imagine what kind of experience of God the person who wrote it must have had! Finding himself having to face life’s challenges, he could not look them in the eye without keeping his eyes on the Lord. “God is for us a refuge and strength, / a helper close at hand, in time of distress: / so we shall not fear though the earth should rock, / though the mountains fall into the depth of the sea, / even though its waters rage and foam, / even though the mountains be shaken by its waves. [...] / The holy place where the Most High dwells / [...] cannot be shaken,” because “God is within” (Psalm 45, in *The Book of Hours*, Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan 2009, pp. 44-45).

This kind of certainty doesn’t emerge when you look down on life from your balcony; it comes from letting yourself be challenged by all that “rocks the earth.” Each time we do this, we feel reality provoking us and we can recognize that, “The Lord of Hosts is with us: / the God of Jacob is our stronghold. / Come, consider the works of the Lord, / the redoubtable deeds He has done on the earth.” This is all part of the road of coming to know God. It’s only by facing our concrete circumstances, the difficulties and challenges, that we can recognize an Other who is at work. “Be still and know that I am God, / supreme among the nations, supreme on earth!” (ibid.) This is not an empty definition; it’s a reality that is so pres-

ent that it shines forth all the brighter the more difficult the challenge is. If this is not the path we’re following, in other words, if we don’t verify this, then our faith will have an expiration date. Sooner or later, it will run out. Not because we do anything that’s exactly contrary to it, but because fear will prevail over us, and after awhile, some other factor will prevail instead of His presence.

With these words from the Psalms before our eyes, we can look back on our time together.

THE VERIFICATION OF THE FAITH: THE GROWTH OF THE “I”

We began Friday evening by remembering, with Fr. Giussani, that “at the beginning [...] we tried to build on something that was happening and that had bowled us over.” Fully aware that to many of us, that attitude seems naïve and unrealistic, Giussani challenged us, saying, “No matter how naïve and shamelessly out of proportion it may have been, this was a pure position”; and he added, “We have in a sense abandoned it, since we have settled on a position that was first and foremost, I want to say, a ‘cultural tradition’ [preferring to measure our presence in the world in terms of results we decided upon] rather than the enthusiasm for a Presence. [Because of this,] we do not know [...] Christ [...] because He is not familiar to us” (*The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2005, p. 103).

As we reminded each other during the Beginning Day, Fr. Giussani indicates a criterion to verify whether our path is truly leading us to know Christ: our point of departure as we engage with reality. “The point of departure of the Christian is an Event,” as we saw in the Psalm. Even in the face of something that shakes the earth, the point of departure is always an event. The alternative is clear; how does a person who doesn’t begin with an event enter reality? “The point of departure of the others is a certain impression of things” (“Avvenimento e responsabilità”

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[Event and Responsibility], *Tracce*, no. 4/1998, p. III), an impression; for example, the quaking earth.

Over the last few weeks, the elections have offered us an opportunity to verify our faith. We have been able to see whether our point of departure in facing that circumstance was an event or an impression we had. Each of us adopted an attitude toward the elections and made a choice, and now we can verify what prevailed in us. We saw how, in many Italians, what prevailed was “a certain impression of things.” Many people stayed home, because their discouragement and a lack of trust won out and they thought, “There’s nothing we can do.” Others reacted with fear or anger, as we can still see in the aftermath of the elections. As one of you said yesterday, the real question is, “What are our attempts an expression of?” We can abstain from judging, staying on the sidelines, or we can try to grasp what’s at the heart of the matter, to see what was brought to light in those attempts through which many tried to respond to something that left an impression upon them, often without grasping the full weight of the thing. As those who spoke at the beginning of the assembly said, this impression led to thinking up ways of responding that express an existential emptiness—Fr. Giussani would say “existential insecurity.” But it is a verification that one

is starting from an event that he is able to go beyond the superficial and grasp the true and ultimate nature of the problem; if he is able to judge how limited people’s responses are, recognizing that they’re insufficient. I always think of the example of the girl from Catalonia during the referendum. She didn’t have to take a class at Harvard to clarify her thoughts: the most obvious sign that she was determined by an event and not by an impression, not by the ideology in which she grew up and lived for years, was that she was able to suddenly unmask the totalizing claims the ideology was making. The first verification of our faith is our capacity to see—to see the reality of things.

In the examples you have shared, we see an illustration of what is capable of responding to our current situation: it’s the “time of the person,” as Fr. Giussani used to say. And we see the verification of our faith—as came out yesterday—precisely in the maturing humanity of people who do not let themselves be defined by misfortune or anger or fear, but rather take action with an event as their point of departure, which gives each of them a truer view of reality. This is what marked a turning point: that we’ve been willing to bet everything on the journey we’re on, a journey that can be verified, proved to be true, by seeing whether our “I” is growing or not. »

» In last Sunday's insert to *Corriere della Sera*, "La Lettura," there was an article that described the situation we're in: "What distinguishes today's Western civilization from others? In my opinion, it's a moral weariness. The principle cause of a cultural crisis in a civilization is when it loses its convictions and its institutions are weakened." In other words, in the end, it's the incapacity to see; people no longer see elementary things clearly, because the subject, the person, is weakened. Everything else is a consequence of that. What risk do we run? The journalist responded, "We risk [... falling into] tribalism," in a word, which is to say that we close ourselves off, defending ourselves from fear. Instead, we must confront the "fear that paralyzes"—he said in his own words—with "the courage to create new, authentic citizens," because what is "worrisome," as the author notes, is a "deficit in education and an anthropological deterioration" (D. Breschi, "...or Cultural Identity," in "la Lettura," *Corriere della Sera*, March 4, 2018). The greatest challenge is one of education, is from beginning to end related to education.

THE PERSON: A CONSTANT IN OUR HISTORY

I hope that what we are living, which is above all else—as I said at the beginning—an experience, will allow us to finally better understand, as a step in our self-awareness, what Fr. Giussani insistently said to us again and again over a long period of time.

"The beginning of the Movement [the first ten years] was [totally] dominated by the problem of the person! And the person is an individual, the person is an individual who says 'I.' Only we have said, for a long time (a bit worried that we might be exaggerating), that the 'I' is the self-awareness of the cosmos, that is, that all of reality is made for human beings. When God created the world, the [...] purpose was to affirm the person. [...] 'I created [everything] so that there could be a creature who could become aware of the fact that I am everything.' [...] The first decade, before the great upheaval of 1968 quickly shifted the focus from the 'I' itself to its actions in society, to the conquest of power [...], before '68, [...] I always began the Exercises with a focus [...] summarized by Jesus' words [...]: 'What profit is there for a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?'" (L. Giussani, *In cammino. 1992-1998*, [On the way: 1992-1998], BUR, Milan, 2014, pp. 337-39). The first ten years were dominated by this awareness.

In 1972, not long after the upheaval of '68, Giussani said, "We have arrived at a very grave moment for our Movement: we have arrived at the point when our Movement

cannot tolerate for even one minute more an associational or organizational approach. The moment has come in which we can no longer exist—in the sense that we can no longer stand ourselves—if things don't originate from life, [...] from the below as life transformed." It's striking that it has to be our children, as our friend who spoke yesterday described, who remind us of this. Giussani goes on to say, "The protest melt-down was able to happen because the value of self-awareness had not yet sprung loose [pay attention to what he says next; it seems like the height of total naïveté!], and only those who had the guilelessness of the Samaritan and Zacchaeus at heart were spared [from the melt-down]" (*The Life of Luigi Giussani*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 2018, pp. 439-40). It leaves you speechless!

In 1992, Giussani stressed that "our first interest is [...] ourselves as acting subjects. Our first interest is that our human subject should be built up, [...] that I may understand what it is and be aware of it [that I have a true awareness of myself]" (*In cammino*, p. 99). This was his primary concern.

In 1998, he returned, once again, to Jesus' phrase about gaining everything but then losing oneself, reiterating that this theme had "diminished somewhat after '68. But now we've picked it up again, because the results of politics or of the 'revolution' [the results of having shifted our attention to politics; we referred to this above with the quotation from Giussani: "Having settled on [...] a 'cultural translation' rather than the enthusiasm for a Presence"] revealed the extreme consequences of a lack of awareness, of self-awareness of the 'I'" (*ibid.*, p. 339). The things that happened were what helped him grasp, with increasing clarity, that this lack of self-awareness was the biggest problem. Thinking of what we are living now, I hope this can help us, too, so we can make a big leap in the awareness of what we are.

For over 20 years, this was Fr. Giussani's point of departure. "In the time we live in, we've reached the sandy threshold of a human desert, where the one facing the sentence is the 'I'; not society, but the 'I' [yesterday we heard our priest friend talk about 13-year-olds committing suicide!], because for the sake of society they kill every possible or imaginable 'I.' While for us, society is born from the existence of the 'I' [as we have seen here: many "I"s have leapt into action lately—for the annual Food Drive, the elections, etc.—these "I"s together have generated a society]. God told Adam and Eve to 'be fruitful and multiply,' but the nature of their task, of their being created as individual

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persons, was that they would form a companionship. A human person cannot live, cannot know or nurture him or herself if not in companionship with another person, in the encounter with another person [as we will see later]. It's as if, as I said, we're in the sand, on the sandy threshold of a terrible collapse of the life of society" (ibid., pp. 340-41.) He said this in 1998.

In such a context, how can we survive? "So how is it possible to resist? How is it possible to offer an alternative to [this] dominion of power?" Fr. Giussani's answer was clear, "The only resource for blocking the intrusion of power is in that vertex of the cosmos that is the 'I,' [...]. The only resource that is left to us is a powerful recovery of the Christian sense of the 'I.' I say the 'Christian' sense not out of preconception, but because Christ's word, Christ's attitude, Christ's conception of the human person, of the 'I,' is the only one that explains all the factors that we feel boiling up inside us, emerging in our hearts. For this reason, [...] no power would be able to crush the 'I' as such, to prevent the 'I' from being 'I'" (ibid., pp. 341-42). And from this "I," a society is born.

"This stress on the value of the 'I' has been not just the reason for a deeper reflection, for a development of religiosity as a fundamental category of the 'I,' but also the fascinating origin of a relationship with all levels of knowledge, the origin of a reading of human experience like that found in the most astute people, who are more gifted with this sensitivity" (ibid., pp. 342-43); for example Leopardi, an author who grasped the true nature of the "I" as few others have.

As early as 1990, Giussani affirmed that, "The harder the times get, the more it is the subject who counts [...]. That which counts is the subject, but the subject [...] is the awareness of an event, the event of Christ, which became history for you through an encounter, and you recognized it" (L. Giussani, *Un evento reale nella vita dell'uomo. 1990-1991* [A real event in the life of man: 1990-1991], BUR, Milan, 2013, p. 39). For those who recognize the urgent problem (like the author of the piece we cited from *Corriere*), the question is: "How do we raise up new subjects?" Fr. Giussani went on to say, "We should work together, helping each other to raise up new subjects, that is, people aware of an event that became history for them, otherwise we can create organizational networks, but we build nothing; we do not give anything new to the world. Therefore, the measure of the growth of the Movement," is not in the results of our activities, but in "the education in faith of the person [this is the measure: the increase of faith in each person, which coincides with

an increase of self-awareness]: the recognition of an event that became history. Christ became history for you [...] He is within you" (ibid.). If He does not enter into every inch of our being, we will face life with our impressions as our starting point, not an Event.

THE METHOD: FOLLOWING AN EVENT

So the real issue for all of us, for a leap of awareness through everything we're living, is continually deepening our understanding that the method Giussani passed on to us consists precisely of the event that happens, of "the event of Christ, which became history for you through an encounter" (ibid.). It's only by following this event that we can be generated as an "I," as subjects who have something new to offer to the world, because "no one generates unless he is generated" ("Joy, Happiness and Boldness: No One Generates Unless He is Generated," *Journey—The CL Magazine* 2/1997, p. 9). Fr. Giussani always reminded us that "our companionship is defined by a method. It can be said that the 'genius' of our Movement lies entirely in its method [...]. It is precisely by safeguarding the authenticity of the method that the content of our experience can be transmitted" (L. Giussani, "From Faith, The Method," *Traces*, n. 1, 2009, p. II). The crucial point for us, then, if we want to move from intention to actuality, is in following this method, safeguarding the authenticity of the method. It's the same thing we've underlined on many occasions over the years in talking about a "particular history" as the keystone of a Christian conception of the world, which we saw demonstrated once

again in all our conversations yesterday.

What is, in fact, "the most reasonable attitude before the Christian event"? Following. These are the two banks that hem in the method: event and following. The event inspires our *following*. Fr. Giussani notes that, "The source of the method is the 'impact' with an unforeseeable and great presence, which reason recognizes as, literally, 'superhuman'" (ibid.). Following "has its origin in faith, which is the acknowledgment in your own life of an exceptional presence that you see as important for your destiny" (ibid.), that constantly draws us to itself, captivating us. "Faith comes to fill the entire horizon of your life [from our daily routine to the elections to our needs and sicknesses, etc.] through the relationship with a presence that corresponds to your heart" (ibid.). And we verify faith's capacity to transform our lives in reality by looking at the way we »

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» face our circumstances—every day, every instant—when something unexpected happens, when things go wrong, or when they go amazingly well but it's not enough, because “without the encounter with an exceptional presence, it is impossible to escape the tragic observation that there is ‘nothing new under the sun’” (ibid.). It's by looking at reality that we can recognize whether, starting from the first moment of our day, our point of departure is the Event or something else.

This is the real battle: deciding to follow an event or following our own analysis. Now we can understand Fr. Giussani's words, which we've been repeating for years, with greater awareness: “Today's culture holds that it is impossible to know, to change oneself and reality ‘merely’ by following a person,” because “our era cannot conceive of the person as an instrument of knowledge and change, because these factors are understood reductively, the first [knowledge] as analytical and theoretical reflection, the second [change] as praxis and application of rules” (ibid.). Where do we look for knowledge and change to come from? An expert analysis, so we always run to the experts. This is why we'll carry this alternative Giussani outlines to our graves: “Instead, for John and Andrew, the first two who ran up against Jesus, it was precisely by following that exceptional person that they learned to know differently and to change themselves and reality. From the moment of that first encounter, the method began to unfold in time” (ibid., pp. III-IV).

As you can see, it's a radical alternative: this is the decision at stake in every matter today's culture faces. We, too, as part of this culture, are tempted to analyze, to distance ourselves from the event in order to know and change ourselves. It's like a child who distances himself from his father in the wake of a car accident (as we discussed Friday evening): he wouldn't be able to face what happened without being afraid. His impression—terror—would prevail. One of you told me yesterday that her son wasn't able to walk into the room of a friend who had died until she got there, but he went in with her. Does this only apply to children and adolescents? Unfortunately, we think this is naïve, so, along with Kant, we say: the relationship with a presence is necessary for children, but we who are all grown up can live without it.

AN EVER-LURKING TEMPTATION

What, then, is our temptation? Trying to “detach ourselves’ from this following, out of the presumption

that [pay attention!] we already know what we are asked to follow. In this way, we fall into partiality, refuse correction, and suspend our striving toward fulfillment” (ibid., p. VII). Fr. Giussani continues, “The grave error is to suspend the method, thinking we can replace it with our own ability,” as Kant thought we should. This is an ever-lurking temptation. Jesus Himself denounced it: “Woe to you, scholars of the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge [they tried to take it over]. You yourselves did not enter and you stopped those trying to enter” (*Lk* 11:52). There is no key of knowledge other than wonder, like that of John and Andrew: “Instead, for John and Andrew, [...] it was precisely by following that exceptional person that they learned to know differently and to change themselves and reality.” The Pope commented on Jesus' words saying, “They lost the key to knowledge because they forgot the closeness of God” (Francis, Homily at Casa Santa Marta, October 19, 2017). In other words, they distanced themselves from God, from His presence in history.

This is what follows from not staying true to the method from the beginning (the method that is part of the event itself—event and following), from distancing oneself from it for the sake of what we “already know.” It's a temptation that always lurks, for each of us, just as it did for Peter. He uttered the greatest words a human being could ever say to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” which elicited the response from Jesus, “Blessed are you, Simon. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father” (*cf. Mt* 16:16-17). But just minutes later, he

fell into temptation; he revealed how little he understood the true meaning of those words he had said to Jesus—just as we do after citing certain phrases from Fr. Giussani. Jesus said to him, “We're going to Jerusalem, because the Messiah has to suffer and be killed.” “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen.” For the sake of the “already known,” Peter puts Jesus on the witness stand for questioning; moments after having recognized Him as the Son of God, Peter reprimands Him. And Jesus replies, “Get behind me, because you are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do” (*cf. Mt* 16:21-23). It's a good thing Jesus is always there to grab us and put us back on the right track, because at the first turn, we go sliding off course. What conditions are required to put us back on track? That He remain present as a presence that we watch and follow after. “Think about John and Andrew: all their life long, the present that was most present was the pres-

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ent of that day. Nothing is comparable [to that day], except the renewal of that day in every day of their lives” (L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Really?!) Possible to Live This Way?]*, BUR, Milan 2011, p. 363).

This is the wonder in which we are also participants: the renewal of that day in every day of our lives, so that everything that happens in our lives, every circumstance we face can be an opportunity to see Him at work. If the event of Christ, the event of the encounter with Him, were confined to the past, it would no longer be able to define the present, and we would be completely defined by our impressions. Therefore, the “renewal of that day in every day” is the definition of the attitude we should have, the attitude we had on day one: “The moral attitude in the walk of faith is obedience,” expressed by the “following of an exceptional presence encountered,” following that wonder. “Obedience constitutes the virtue proper to following” (“From Faith, the Method,” p. VIII).

THE TEST: “EVERYONE WHO FOLLOWS ME WILL RECEIVE A HUNDREDFOLD IN THIS LIFE”

What does it mean to follow? Is it something each of us has to dream up? Fr. Giussani never left us in ambiguity, so what does it mean to follow what has happened to us, to follow that form of teaching to which we’ve given ourselves? “You have to live conversion: not to me, but to what I have been told” (“Avvenimento e responsabilità,” p. VIII), that is, we have to follow what the Lord continues to give us through what He causes to happen in front of our eyes, as we have seen over the last few months. Those who have been following this method find themselves facing life determined by a presence that becomes more familiar with every circumstance, and each person can verify the truth of this. Jesus did not, in fact, just tell us, “Follow me!” Along with that command, he also gave us a criterion to verify whether that following is reasonable. What shows »

» us that it is reasonable to follow? The hundredfold: “Everyone who follows me will receive a hundredfold in this life” (cf. *Mt 19:29*); not the hundredfold that you imagine, because the hundredfold Jesus promises is much more than what you can imagine—it’s without measure. If it were the hundredfold as you imagine it, it would be too little compared to the capacity of your soul.

Do you want to know if you’re following? The test comes directly from Jesus: verify whether, in following Him, you experience the hundredfold; if you are happier, freer, more capable of a life that is not a lament; if you are able to face every circumstance, whether beautiful or ugly, with an ultimate positivity. Then, we can also verify that, in following Christ, we don’t lose our life in living, because with all that we already know, we can easily lose our lives. This is the test. You can’t go wrong: see if you are living with a greater enthusiasm and interest in all that is happening. You can’t fake it. If you’re not, try to convince yourselves that you’re living the hundredfold! It’s impossible! You can’t fake it!

In the face of the world’s existential emptiness, we will only have something to offer if we are able to bring something into real life that’s capable of responding to the emptiness. But this comes from what we are living, not from an abstract reflection; it comes through what we’re living and the journey we’re making—all that has emerged and has been confirmed in what we’ve said so far in these days together—which help to clarify the task we’ve been given. Otherwise, we’d be useless to everyone, first of all to ourselves, because it’s not just watching time go by that will help us understand what we’re here in the world to do.

So, then, in the challenges we, along with the society we are part of, find ourselves facing—what can we offer? More and more people are coming to us, hoping for a light that can illuminate their paths. “Christians need to come out from their hiding places,” Spanish journalist Pilar Rahola cried out in one of his columns. “We may not all have their faith, but their faith makes us all better” (P. Rahola, “Disarming Beauty,” *La Vanguardia*, May 21, 2017). They’re telling us in every way possible, “We need you. We don’t need what you have in your heads; we need you.” Many people are interested in what makes us different from everyone else, a difference that flows from the experience of the charisma that

has been given to us and that reaches others through the circumstances that happen, through an encounter.

We will be able to verify whether our self-awareness in our task is growing by the way we engage in the coming months: each of us can see if we have more awareness and clarity about our task by how we get our hands dirty, how we face difficulties, how we take an interest in the needs around us, and by the way we react to the challenges we face. Let’s help each other with our reciprocal witness, continuing to clarify which road to take. I’m thinking above all of young people, a category the Pope has held up for everyone as an emergency concern for the upcoming Synod. Are we capable of communicating something to them that’s adequate to the level of their questioning and restlessness? Are we able to respond to the needs that we saw come out of the elections? Not the poorly-formulated images of what is needed, but to what is beneath and motivates those im-

ages? And even before this, are we able to grasp the true nature of the need? Based on this, we can already see if we are a part of that “particular history,” whose authenticity is demonstrated by the generation of persons who are capable of perceiving human needs with clarity. Only those who have followed a path to identifying their own needs, who encounter and experience that which truly satisfies them, can in turn grasp the needs of others and, through their lives, communicate the truth of the presence that embraces and transforms our humanity, making “the impossible possible.”

Do you want to know if you’re following? Verify whether you experience the hundredfold, if you are able to face every circumstance.

Let’s conclude, then, by rereading those words from Fr. Giussani that we selected for this year’s Easter poster, because they summarize the source from which all of this flows: “Ever since the day Peter and John ran to the empty tomb and saw Him risen and alive in their midst, everything can change. From then on, and forever, a person can change, can live, can live anew. The presence of Jesus of Nazareth is like the sap that, from within—mysteriously but certainly—refreshes our dryness and makes the impossible possible. What for us is impossible is not impossible for God. So that the slightest hint of a new humanity, to someone who looks with a sincere eye and heart, becomes visible through the company of those who recognize that He is present: God-with-us. The slightest hint of a new humanity, like dry and bitter nature becoming fresh and green once more.”