

## A surge of life

A preview of the interview with Davide Prosperi in *Città Nuova*. The full text will appear in the August issue

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***We now come to a challenging question. Fr. Giussani, with his charisma and strong personality, certainly left a void. Then came Carrón's resignation as a result of the new regulations on the governance of lay associations and the recent June 10 letter from Cardinal Farrell. It seems that the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation—as indeed are other ecclesial Movements—is going through a challenging period. Is this the case? What does this moment mean for you?***

What the Church has been proposing to all movements for some time now has a special meaning for CL. First of all, it must be said that this is an **opportunity for growth** for the whole movement, and for each of us. It is not simply a matter of adjusting to legal norms that have changed; rather, we must recognize that **we have been corrected, which we must welcome with gratitude and with an attitude of openness to renewal**, despite the struggle and possible misunderstandings there may be. The Church has never failed to reiterate its esteem for our experience. On the other hand, **it takes a simplicity of heart to accept correction**. Especially if it occurs when one thought, or at least many thought, that everything was going well. It takes a great simplicity of heart to recognize what truly corresponds to the fundamental needs of the person, which are not always immediately apparent. In this regard, **Fr. Giussani** said that **an asceticism is needed** to recognize the fundamental needs and evidences of the heart (cf. *The Religious Sense*). Remaining faithful to the demands of the heart sometimes requires sacrifice, and the Church is helping us in this. At the same time I also want to say that **everyone in CL, especially those who struggle the most, should be able to make their own journey in their own time**, and while they are making it they should always feel the warmth of our companionship. **No one should feel excluded**, no one should feel left out, everyone deserves to be heard.

It is now worthwhile to consider **the correction contained in the letter sent to me last June 10 by Cardinal Farrell**. In what does it consist? It concerns the so-called "**succession theory of the charism**," which not only has to do with how the president or governing bodies of CL are appointed, but also has important educational implications: **it is about how "authority" is lived**, that is, how one understands its nature and function within the movement, and therefore also its relationship to members of the community. It is not a matter of theological norms detached from life, of doctrinal disquisitions that should be dealt with by experts and that do not affect personal experience. Far from it. Experience is always and inevitably made **by following someone**, that is, within the path traced by a **received teaching**. Experience without teaching is a fantasy. In this sense—I would like to emphasize this—life and doctrine not only must not be, but in fact are never separate. More or less consciously, one always lives a Christian experience having a certain conception of what it means to follow an authority; to focus on this aspect therefore does mean not to concern oneself with abstract

matters that have little to do with faith, but rather to help ensure that such an experience becomes increasingly more conscious and mature.

In concrete terms, we are told that the idea that **there is an ultimate point in the movement, in this case a person, who possesses the only authentic interpretation of the charism** is wrong. Fr. Giussani has never systematically carried out a doctrinal study of the nature of charism, rather on a few occasions he used images to illustrate what it means for us. Once, for example, he defined the charism as a **"surge of life."** Such a surge of life was given by the Holy Spirit to Fr. Giussani and was transmitted by him in different forms to those who adhered to his proposal, either a little or a lot. Through him, therefore, this charism was given to the Church. **No one, not even Fr. Giussani, is the "owner" of the charism,** having received and given it. He was the means of fundamental Grace for the birth of a new form of Christian life in the Church.

Now, if we begin to believe that such a charism is shared by all—albeit in varying degrees with respect to God's freedom and the generosity of each of us—but that it is granted to some to such an exceptional degree that they become **the sole** or at any rate **the supreme interpreter of it in the present,** that is where problems begin. Not only because this idea is itself problematic, but also because of the consequences it has for the method of choosing a successor for leadership. The error, and this is where the Church corrects us, would then be to think that an indication for the designation of authority should **come from above,** since the only person in whom the charism is most alive is **qualified to recognize** their legitimate successor. In itself, the method of choosing leadership by **co-optation** would not be inadmissible in an absolute sense, but it becomes seriously problematic when the kind of meaning just described is attributed to this choice. Instead, to say that **authority must be elected** is the practical translation of the principle that **the charism is given by will of the Spirit to all the baptized who have been seized by this gift.** Therefore, leadership, while embodied in an ultimate point of reference that is personal, which hopefully may also be the most authoritative, **must be an expression of communion.** If, on the other hand, the "succession theory" described above is taken at face value, authority becomes irreplaceable and infallible.

Of course, historically CL has always had a personal authority, and presumably will continue to do so. But the point is that when authority is theorized to be by virtue of a **supreme understanding of the charism,** then it becomes almost inevitable that this person (and with it those who follow him or her) will think that following the charism means in fact **following his or her own personal perception and interpretation.**

Instead, the Church calls us to recognize that **leadership is an expression of communion, of friendship. We are jointly responsible together for the gift received** and therefore the educational proposal is the fruit of an authority that lives in **co-responsibility.**

Fr. Giussani himself, as I was told, in the final phase of his life said several times, **"I was only a channel."** That is, he passed on what the Spirit wanted to give the Church for its renewal. He accepted, respected this initiative of the Mystery, just as others after him accepted it and became responsible for it.