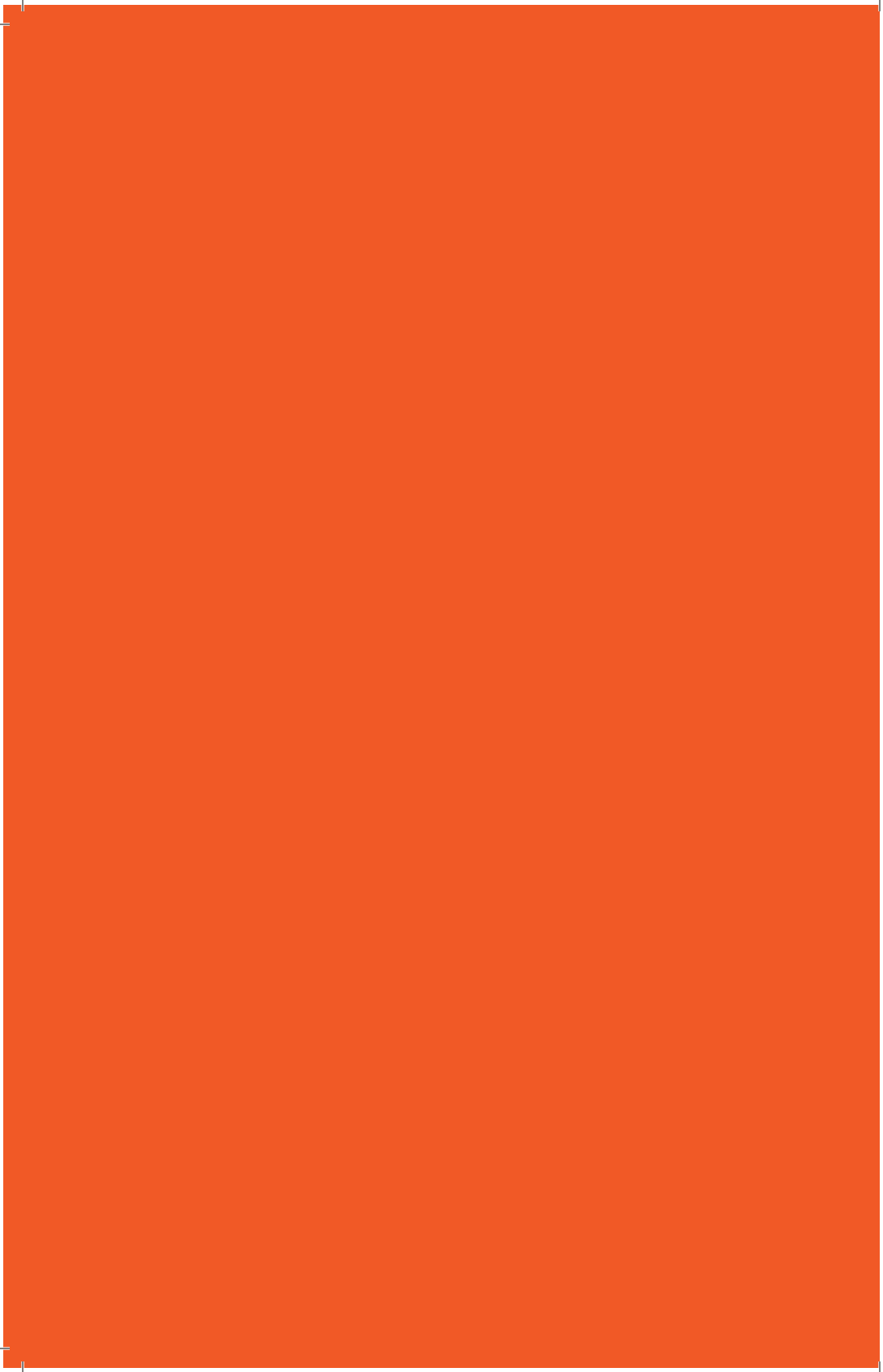


NEW YORK
ENCOUNTER X



THE JOURNEY TO THE TRUTH

*An exhibit on the Servant
of God Fr. Luigi Giussani
on the centennial of his birth*



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INTRODUCTION

The year 2022 marks the centenary of the birth of the Servant of God Fr. Luigi Giussani (1922-2005). This anniversary offers the opportunity to deepen and make known the novelty that he continues to bring into the lives of many, the “vibration” of faith that he transmitted with his proposal, for the good of the Church and of society. How does Fr. Giussani help us face today’s many challenges? How does his thinking address the questions of this year’s New York Encounter’s theme? What does his spiritual fatherhood generate today? These questions are at the center of “The Journey to the Truth,” an exhibit first presented at New York Encounter 2022.

If you would like to know more about the life and the legacy of Father Luigi Giussani, please also visit the virtual exhibition created on the occasion of the Centenary of his birth at <https://mostra.luigigiussani.org>.

CHAPTER 1

Fr. Giussani and the Communion and Liberation movement



WHO IS FR. GIUSSANI? HOW COMMUNION AND LIBERATION WAS BORN

Q: Fr. Giussani, your young people call you “Don Gius,” but the only nickname you seem to accept is that of “instigator” of this movement of Communion and Liberation.

Fr. Giussani: Initiator.

Q: So who is Fr. Giussani?

Fr. Giussani: He is a priest like any other of the Diocese of Milan, who completed the entire itinerary of seminary life, all of it, having started at age 10.

Q: You entered the seminary at age 10?

Fr. Giussani: Yes. I also stayed on for a few years as a teacher. But then I left in order to dedicate myself to teaching religion in the public schools, attempting to communicate religion in a way that was more easily accepted by young people.

Q: So then, you refuse this image of a charismatic father, who assumes an almost guru-like influence on the movement?

Fr. Giussani: Clearly, clearly, I must refuse it. Because my story is the story of many others who, in loving young people, succeed, by the grace of God – and in this sense it can be called “charism” – in communicating certainties to them and a capacity for affection of which they would otherwise seem incapable.

Q: All right, let’s look again at this adventure of yours. In 1954, you were teaching at the Venegono Seminary, when you had an insight, and you asked to be allowed to teach in a Milanese high school, the Berchet. Can you explain to us what insight you had?

Fr. Giussani: To tell you the truth, it's very banal. Having found a group of students on the train, and having noted their hostility toward the religious fact, and having inferred that their hostility derived more from ignorance than from malice, I said, "Perhaps what is needed is someone who can explain faith to them, the contents of faith, in a way that is – and here is the word that I used immediately – "reasonable."

Q: What does "reasonable" mean?

Fr. Giussani: Corresponding to the original needs of human nature.

Q: So, at that time – we are still talking about 1954 – the scenario that presented itself was apparently that of a Catholic Italy, with a Christian Democratic Party that had more than half, maybe three-quarters of the vote...

Fr. Giussani: More than half? I don't believe so. Never, not even in 1948.

Q: But in any case, let's say that the churches were full, there was a structure. Why, then, were you concerned in that moment?

Fr. Giussani: There was an evident formalistic detachment between religious practice and a conviction capable of giving reasons for faith, of explaining its motives and of describing the reasons for some of its manifestations.

Q: So why did you ask – if indeed you asked – to go to a public school and not a private school, to begin this adventure?

Fr. Giussani: The public school would have been, so to speak, a more consistent test of the general situation.

Q: That is, you chose, let's say, a position in the trenches, with respect to...

Fr. Giussani: An open position, in an environment that was totally open and, let's say, freer.



THE METHOD

Fr. Giussani: All of our methodology can be traced to the attempt to present the content of the Christian method as “correspondent,” in the etymological sense of the word. That is, as responding to the needs that, no matter what version and inflection they assume, animate the men of today, the young people of today – just as they animated the men and the young people of yesterday, because human nature remains exactly the same.

THE NAME “COMMUNION AND LIBERATION”

Fr. Giussani: We, like everyone else, want a better humanity. But it is not possible for humanity to live better by itself, alone, with only its projects, its fantasies, and its energies. Every human impetus is born from an ideology – that is, from a more or less organized point of view, and more or less quickly it travels a trajectory in which the initial, ideal aspect is immediately massacred. One reproduces the error that he wanted to remove, perhaps making it even worse.

From the beginning, we maintained that it was not possible to do things differently, except under one hypothesis: that, in the midst of men, among men, an absolutely new fact had emerged. A fact that is not created by them, not formulated by them, because if man produces evil, produces bad situations, inhuman situations, then what is necessary is the intervention of a factor of another nature, a factor that comes from something else, so that the hope for an authentic revival, for a journey of authentic improvement, is conceivable.

This is what we want to say with the term “Communion and Liberation.” It is only the communion that God made possible with Himself through Christ. It is only the communion among men who recognize this, that – in expanding itself – creates oases of truer humanity. From the beginning, we spoke of only one thing: the desire that Christian truth be known, and that through this recognition, young people could live in a way that was

cleaner, more balanced, happier, more capable of forgiveness – and, above all, more capable of being forgiven, understood and forgiven, because this is what man needs most of all.

THE PROPOSAL

Q: In your opinion, what were the reasons that brought many young people to Communion and Liberation in those years?

Fr. Giussani: In my opinion, there are two reasons. First, the message of certainty. A message of certainty, of...how can I put it? The communication of a certainty regarding the meaning of life. And second, the demonstration of how this certainty of the meaning of life constitutes a working hypothesis that is more efficacious, more efficient than not having this certainty.

Q: That is, giving a sense of belonging to these young people, filling some voids, giving them some values?

Fr. Giussani: Giving them not only some values, but first and foremost the need for an ultimate meaning – an ultimate meaning! Because values, if they are not perceived as the echo of an ultimate meaning, still leave people indifferent, and are useful only for a project, if need be – a partial, political project. For us, faith invests the entire subject and, therefore, determines the human person in all that he does. Better: it tends to determine the human person in all that he does. That is to say, faith is not a sky that opens up above the earth, but it is a movement of, a vibration of the earth. All the problems that interest man, interest the man of faith; and being a man of faith, he tries to approach them according to a new vision and a new methodology.

CHAPTER 2

How can we reach truth?



A PROBLEM OF METHOD

“How can we reach the truth?” This final question in the theme of the 2022 New York Encounter evokes one of the pillars of Fr. Giussani’s educational approach. As he often told his students at the Berchet High School:

I am not here so that you can take my ideas as your own. I am here to teach you a true method that you can use to judge the things I will tell you. And what I have to tell you is the result of a long experience, of a past that is 2000 years old.

His ultimate goal was not to convince them of “his” truth but to teach them a method. The word “method” in Greek means path. Fr. Giussani believed that his task as an educator was to show his students the path to the truth.

In his writings, Fr Giussani discusses at length how one can discover for himself or herself whether a proposal is true, especially a proposal that concerns the most profound and important human questions. His answer can be summarized as follows:

The journey to truth is an experience.

This journey requires a comparison between what we feel and our elementary experience.

WHAT DOES FR. GIUSSANI MEAN BY ELEMENTARY EXPERIENCE?

He describes it as:

a complex of needs and “evidences” which accompany us as we come face to face with all that exists.

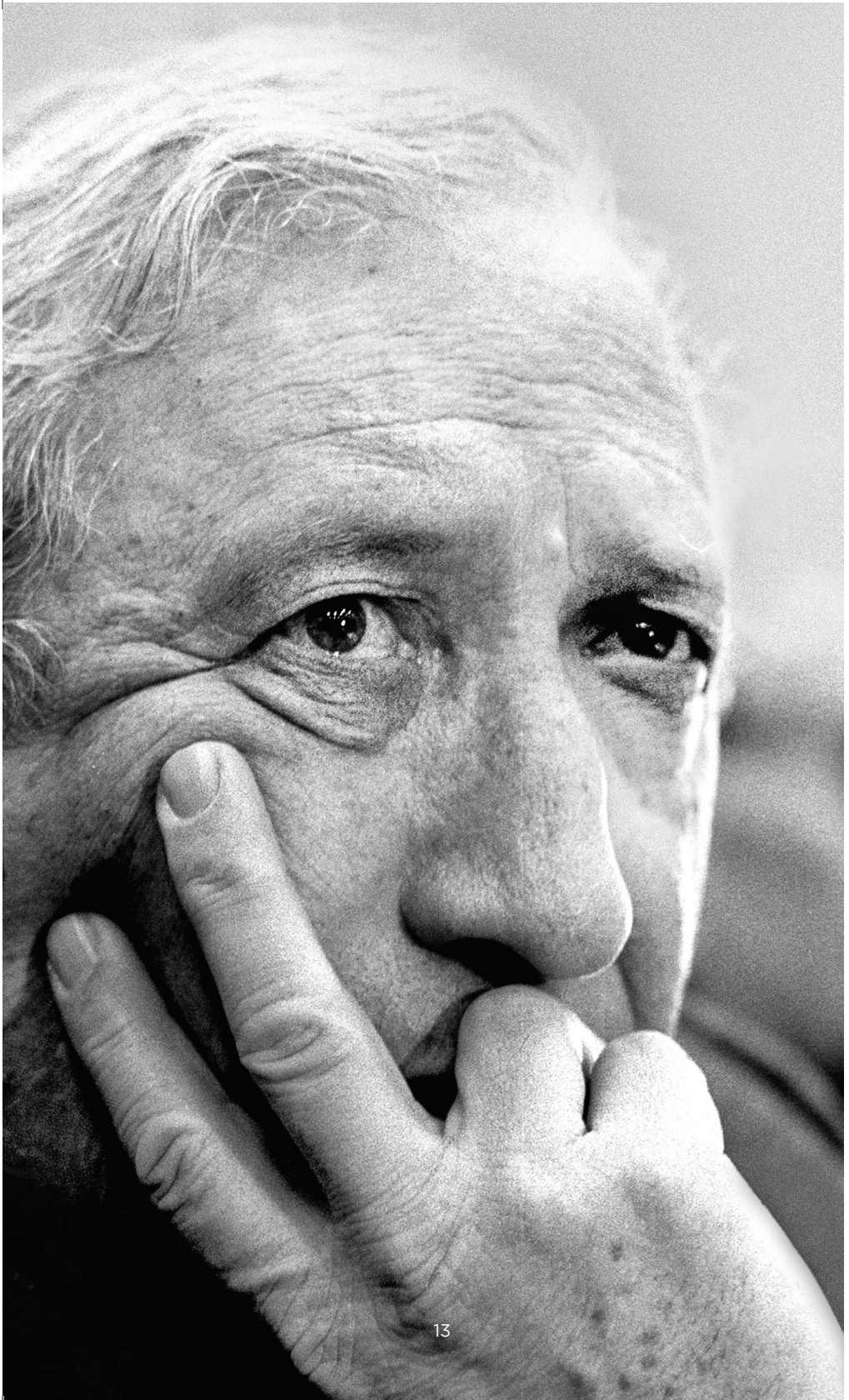
What are these needs?

These needs can be given many names ... for example, the need for happiness, the need for truth, for justice. They are like a spark igniting the human engine.

These needs are objective and universal.

They constitute our “heart”.

The need for goodness, justice, truth, and happiness constitutes man’s ultimate identity, the profound energy with which people in all ages and of all races approach everything, enabling them to exchange not only things but also ideas and to transmit riches to each other over the distance of centuries.



WHAT IS EXPERIENCE?

Fr. Giussani uses an example to explain how this comparison with our elementary experience works:

→ *A man is in love with a girl: this is a fact, it's a phenomenon. A young poet is passing by with his hands in his pockets and he runs into this fact. This fact enters the horizon of his eyes, the domain of his knowledge. This is the beginning of the phenomenon, but it's not the whole thing. Facing this object of knowledge, the poet's eyes are burning with curiosity, with attraction, with approval, because he sees in that phenomenon something that he also would like, but, being only a fifteen year old poet, it is still out of reach for him.*

He feels a longing: he feels, meaning that he reacts with envy and with a desire for that phenomenon for himself. Up to this point it's not an experience, but something he feels: an object of knowledge, a presence of a little piece of reality that he feels, that makes him react, in this case spontaneously. However, the knowledge of that phenomenon, by making him envious, raises some questions.

The poet's entire nature asks questions about what he feels, the envy he feels, the longing he feels. "Is it real satisfaction? Is it happiness? Is it truth and happiness?" These needs are not part of what he feels, but they rise inside him when he faces what he feels, inside him when he's engaged with what he feels. These questions judge what he feels. At this point the pure and simple feeling becomes experience.

In other words, the comparison takes place when we judge our feelings in light of our deepest needs and questions.

Feeling, the mere feeling rises to the dignity of experience when the content you feel is being judged by the ultimate questions of your heart: they are criteria of truth, of the true man, of true humanity, of the true destiny of man.

Man is educated by experience, not by what he feels.

THE DYNAMISM OF REASON

Essential to experience, this comparison between what man feels and his ultimate questions is a fundamental work of reason.

Reason is the need to understand existence, that is, the need for an adequate, total explanation of existence. This explanation cannot be found within the horizon of life's experience. No matter how much this horizon widens, this longing for an answer will remain.

The very dynamism of reason forces us to affirm the exhaustive answer beyond the horizon of our life. The answer exists. It cries out through the entreaties that make up our being. But it cannot be defined by experience. It is there, but we do not know what it is.

Fr. Giussani explains this with another example:

→ *Imagine that reason were a great mountain climber who scaled the highest summit on the globe and, once at the top, realized that the peak which he had just climbed was merely an infinitely small foothill leading to an enormous mountain whose beginning or end could not be seen. The summit of reason's conquest is the perception of an unknown unreachable presence, to which all human movement is destined, because it depends upon it. It is the idea of mystery.*

REASON YEARNs TO KNOW THE UNKNOWN

To summarize:

Reason is the need to understand what exists, but because in life this is not possible, fidelity to reason forces us to admit the existence of something beyond our comprehension...Once this “something” is discovered, reason yearns to know the unknown.

In Fr. Giussani’s view, the pursuit of this “something” is what makes life worth living.

It is this relationship with that “beyond” which ensures the adventure of the here and now. Otherwise, boredom dominates - a boredom which leads to elusive and evasive presumption or censorious desperation. Only the relationship with the “beyond” makes the adventure of life possible.

However, in the end, the mystery remains unfathomed.

Our nature is need for truth and fulfillment, or, in other words, happiness. All human movement, whatever it might be, is dictated by this urgency that constitutes us. But this desire, having reached the extreme borders of our life experience, still does not find what it has been searching for: at the utmost frontier of its lived territory, this urgent need of ours still has not found its answer.





THE EXAMPLE OF ULYSSESS

In order to illustrate reason's striving for this unattainable mystery, Fr. Giussani refers to the character of Ulysses in Dante's Divine Comedy. Ulysses went out in search of the unattainable, going beyond the limit of the known world, the "Pillars of Hercules."

→ *Ulysses is the intelligent man who would measure all things with his own acumen. He is relentlessly curious, wandering from Ithaca to Libya, from Libya to Sicily, from Sicily to Sardinia, from Sardinia to the Balearic Islands - measuring and governing the entire Mediterranean Sea. Ulysses represents man as the measure of all things. But, once he arrives at the Pillars of Hercules, he confronts a common belief that beyond the Pillars nothing is reliable any longer - all is emptiness and madness. Whoever ventures beyond this point is a dreamer who will never reach any certainty. Likewise, beyond the confines of reason as the measure of all things, there is only fantasy or at least no possibility of certainty.*

Ulysses, however, precisely because of that very "stature" that had driven him all over the Mediterranean, felt not only that arriving at the Pillars of Hercules was not the end, but in fact, it was the moment when his true nature would be unleashed. And so he smashed to pieces the conventional wisdom and went on. He did not make a mistake in doing so: to venture forward was in his nature as a man, and, in making this decision, he truly felt like a man.

Ulysses' attempt was foolish, not so much because he presumed to cross the ocean, but rather because he presumed to cross it using the same means by which he knew the Mediterranean Sea...It is the ocean that Ulysses is trying to navigate, but the ocean 'swallows' him, because it is larger than the little ship he uses to traverse it. He has to find a bigger ship.

A VERTIGINOUS POSITION

Facing this unattainable mystery, man finds himself in a vertiginous position.

The realization of the existence of this supreme unknown, upon which all history and the world depends, is reason's pinnacle and its vertigo. This means that, ideally, a human being who fulfills his true capacity, his nature - with all of his will for life, his affection for the real - ought to be at the mercy of, hanging on, moment by moment, to this unreachable, indecipherable, ineffable, absolute Unknown.

Human reason lives this dizzying condition: the explanation exists, but it is not within our grasp. It is there, but we do not know what it is.

Fr. Giussani noted that this condition is perfectly described by the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato in his work *Phaedo*:

→ *Well-spoken, said Simmias. I will tell you my difficulty...I believe, as perhaps you do, that precise knowledge on that subject is impossible or extremely difficult in our present life, but that it surely shows a very poor spirit not to examine thoroughly what is said about it, and to desist before one is exhausted by an all-round investigation. Man should achieve one of these things: learn the truth about these things or find it for oneself, or, if that is impossible, adopt the best and most irrefutable of men's theories, and, borne upon this, sail through the dangers of life as upon a raft, unless someone should make that journey safer and less risky upon a firmer vessel, that is to say, with the help of a revealed word of God.*

THE HYPOTESIS OF REVELATION

The endpoint of the human quest, therefore, is the hypothesis of revelation.

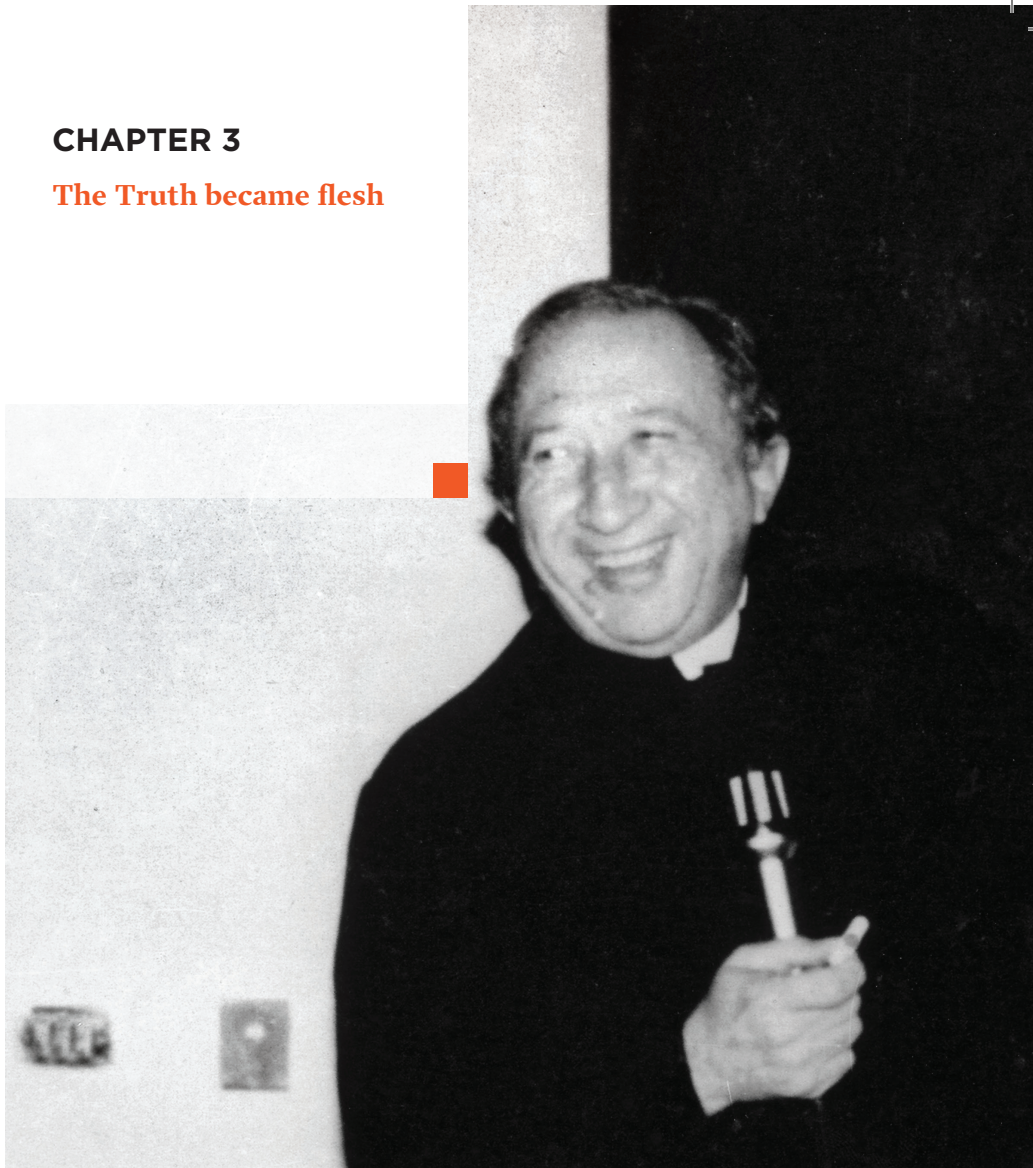
The longing for a “redemption,” for a sure route to cross the sea of meaning, had been prophetically voiced four centuries before Christ, in Plato’s *Phaedo*. At the extremity of life’s experience, at the edge of this passionate and hard-won consciousness of existence, in spite of man himself, this cry of the truest humanity breaks out as an entreaty, a begging.

And then emerges the great hypothesis: *“unless someone should make that journey safer and less risky upon a firmer vessel, that is to say, with the help of a revealed word of God.”*

Properly speaking, this is called hypothesis of revelation. In the proper sense of the word, “revelation” does not mean man’s interpretation of reality, human nature in search of its meaning. Rather, revelation means the possibility of a real fact, a historical event, a presence within history that speaks as a friend, a father, a mother - Plato’s *Phaedo* aspired to this kind of revelation.

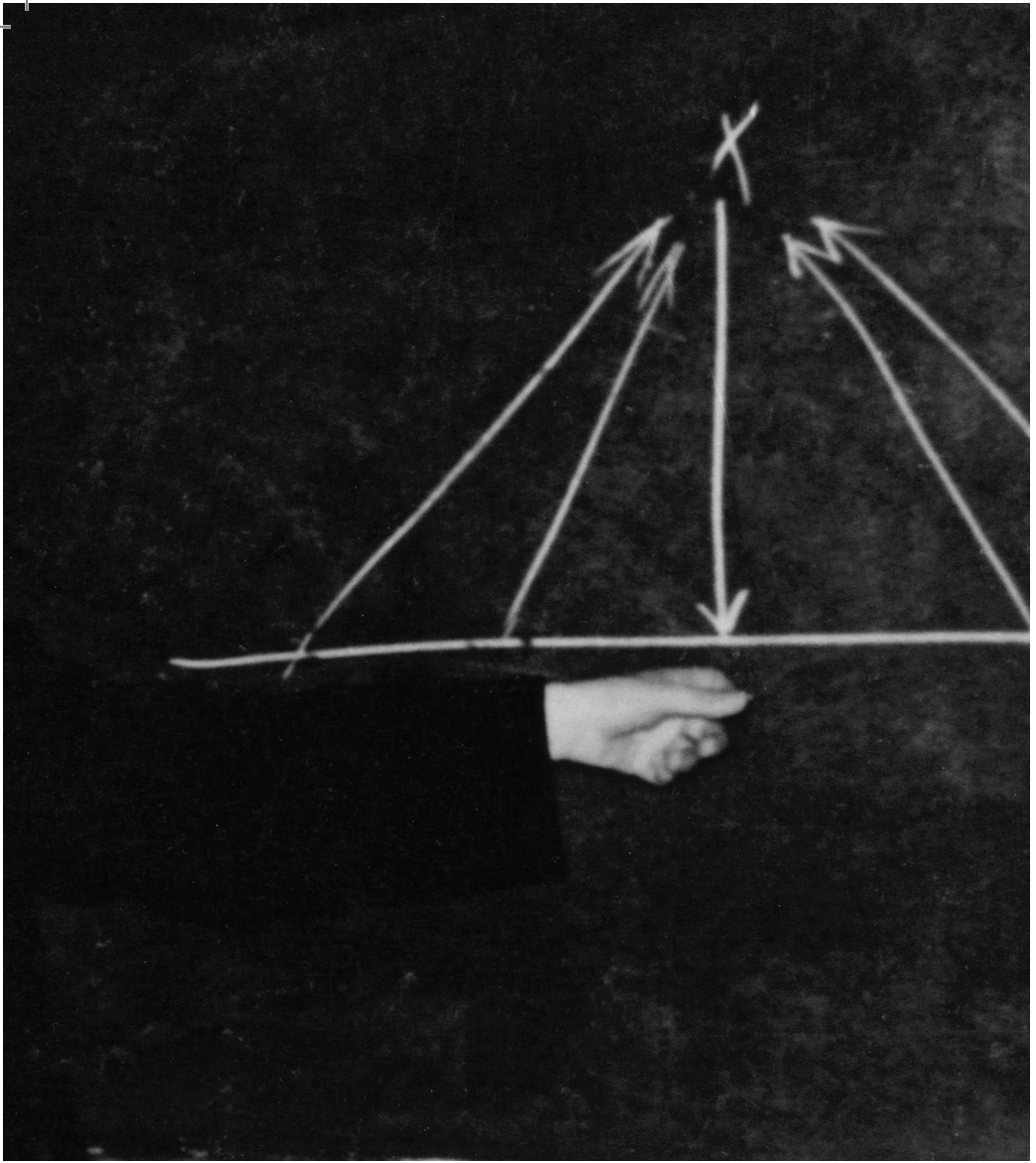
CHAPTER 3

The Truth became flesh



THE INVERSION OF THE RELIGIOUS METHOD

The hypothesis that the mystery has penetrated man's existence by speaking to him in human terms alters the man-destiny relationship which will no longer be based on human effort, the fruit of man's construction or imagination, the study of a distant,



enigmatic thing, or on waiting for something absent. Instead, it will mean coming up against something present.

In this hypothesis, the religious method would lose all of its disturbing connotations of an enigmatic deferment to something in the distance. Rather, it would have the dynamics of an experience, **the experience of a present, an encounter.**



THE CHRISTIAN EVENT HAS THE FORM OF AN ENCOUNTER

To make Himself known, God entered human life as a Man, taking on a human form, so that the thought, imagination, and affectivity of man are as though “blocked”, magnetized by Him. The Christian event has the form of an encounter: it is something which penetrates our eyes, touches our heart, which can be grasped by our hand.

This initiative by God corresponds to our deepest human needs.

It would be impossible to become fully aware of what Jesus Christ means if one did not first become fully aware of the nature of that dynamism which makes man human.

Christ proposes Himself as the answer to what “I” am and only an attentive, tender, and impassioned awareness of my own self can make me open and lead me to acknowledge, admire, thank, and live Christ.

Without this awareness, even Jesus Christ becomes just a name.

MARY

God can take the nothingness that we are and make it into something great. This happened to Our Lady, and the Almighty joined Himself to her in a way inconceivable for us, in a way so great we certainly cannot imagine it.

He could not have done more than this; it is as if, in becoming the child of that girl, God exhausted His infiniteness.

“And the Word was made flesh,” just as each of us was made flesh in our mother’s womb. These are things you have to look at in order to begin to perceive and to feel them, let alone to be able to talk of them; they are things you just have to stand by and watch, like you watch the greatest and most beautiful things, but even these are but a pale comparison.

So, the Blessed Virgin’s religious sentiment was taken hold of by God’s power, since “nothing is impossible for God,” and thus the Son of the Most High became her son.

So, the Mystery in the Christian sense is the event that makes us understand what God is, God in as much as He makes Himself communicable and the object of experience, joining Himself in some way to something; from the voice that spoke from the burning bush, and the voice that spoke through the prophets, to this summit, this truly ineffable summit, that we cannot express except by embracing its fruit: God became the son of that young woman.

How did she express herself? The Gospel tells us: *fiat*.

Fiat, like a breath: just as that small fifteen-year-old girl was nothing, so this great act—without which the whole history of the world would be changed, or rather would not have been changed—this act, fiat, which had a crucial value for the whole world, is like a breath, the breath of freedom. And freedom is capacity to adhere to Being, to Mystery, to Being that reveals Itself through the Mystery, to the Mystery that invades our lives.

Fiat, yes-yes!

What strikes me most when I read the Gospel account of the Annunciation is when the Angel finishes speaking and Our Lady says, “Yes, let it be done to me according to Your word.” Period. “And the Angel left her.” I like to stop at this phrase, “And the Angel left her;” and try to put myself in her place, to imagine how this girl must have felt psychologically, without any support, without any apparent motivation, other than loyalty to that memory. She could have said, “It was an illusion, it was just my imagination.” “And the Angel left her.”

Just think. She was left to face her fiancé, her parents, and what was throbbing in her as life was not yet tangible, not yet provable, not yet possible to experience.

I think I can grasp in this phrase the true moment of faith, the culminating moment of faith. A moment made, built, made truly of devotion to reason, of the truth of reason, of loyalty to her own story, of loyalty to what had just come to pass, and of fidelity to the greatness of God, of which somehow a hint had given evidence.

**JOHN
AND
ANDREW**

They followed him at a distance, timidly and shamefully, but strangely, profoundly and obscurely fascinated and curious, as well. Those two disciples, hearing him speak like that, followed Jesus. “Jesus turned and seeing that they followed him said, ‘What are you looking for?’ They answered, ‘Rabbi, where do you live?’ He said, ‘Come and see.’” This is the formula, the Christian formula. This is the Christian method: come and see. “And they went and saw where he lived and stayed with him all day. It was about four in the afternoon.”

But imagine those two who stayed there listening to him for hours and then afterwards had to go home. He said goodbye to them and they returned home in utter silence, full of the impression they had of that mystery they felt, of which they had a foretaste, which they had felt, and then they split up. They did not say goodbye, not because they exchanged no words but because they said goodbye in a different way, without saying anything, because the same thing filled their hearts, and being so filled with the same thing the two of them were one.

Andrew entered his house, put down his cloak and his wife said, “Andrew, what’s wrong? You’re different; what’s happened?” Imagine him embracing her and bursting into tears while she, overwhelmed, kept on asking, “What is wrong?” And he held his wife, who had never felt embraced in that way before in her whole life; he was another person. He was another person! It was him but he was another.

And in fact, they went back to Him the next day, He returned to them on the third day, because he lived in a nearby village. He began to go fishing with them, and in the afternoon he went to stay with them on the beach when they were mending the nets. And when, every now and then, he began to go around the villages,

he would call on them as he was passing and say, "Come with me." Some went; some did not. Then in the end they all went. They ended up going for a few hours, then for more, then the whole day, then he began to stay out even at night,

Every day they heard what he said, everyone was there open-mouthed, and they even more open-mouthed. They never tired of listening to Him.

ZACCHAEUS

Everyone was talking about it. What he did and what he said and what he was so amazed people that they murmured about it, talked about it, with indignation or with an attraction that had no comparison in the experience of life.

And so that man, with a very well-known role in his town, that man who everyone shunned as a crook, a thug, somebody at the service of the oppressors of the people—that man wanted to see Him and therefore ran ahead of the crowd, where Christ was walking and speaking.

He ran ahead, the Gospel says, and pulled himself up and perched on that tree. And then, lo and behold, the crowd was approaching—lo and behold, the crowd was standing right there.

Jesus stopped and looked at him and said, calling him by his name, “Zacchaeus.” Zacchaeus. I’m repeating this to you because that’s what I’ve been repeating to myself for more than two years, since this page struck me so much for the first time.

Because my very name is represented in that name as a partner of God, as a person whom Christ addresses: it is your name! But how easy it is for me, how easy it is for us, to understand what that instant represented for the whole life of that man!

To have once seen something, to have heard something so great, so magnificent—“Zacchaeus, I’m coming to your house.” But it was the face and the gaze, it was the whole person of that Man who struck the poverty, the small-mindedness of Zacchaeus, the infinite forgetfulness of his own dignity, which had disqualified his whole life, filling it with instinctiveness, with greed. And in an instant, in that word—“Zacchaeus”—he felt totally freed, freed from the yoke of evil. He certainly didn’t think all these things then, he felt them, he lived them. He was no longer the one he was

before. Even better: in his own eyes he was not the one he was before. Let us think how the anger and the indulged greed and the mistreatment of a friend or a loved one renewed in him what he was feeling while crouching on that tree: pain, but a pain that could not dispel that certainty, that will to recover, that affectivity that, trembling as long as you want, it is like a lasting joy.

We are loved more than we ever fail.

PETER

I almost feel ashamed to comment, but nonetheless I encourage you to put the good will of your heart into what is ineffable and cannot be said about the mystery of God who touches the human person, and of the human person who is touched by the mystery of God.

Not considering the fact that He first asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” And it is almost understandable that Peter would have answered, “Certainly, Lord, You know that I love You.” But the second and third time Christ only asks him: “Simon, do you love Me?” No more, no less.

Let’s try to identify with that blunt and rough man in front of the Lord, his soul full of the memory of his betrayal. His betrayal was simply the epiphany, the epiphenomenon, the manifestation of a moment, of something he had within: coarseness, lack of generosity, obduracy, fear, timidity, cowardice, pettiness: he was all of this! Peter’s soul was full of this, and in front of that question everything came to the surface; the betrayal was like a point of revelation. All his miserableness came to the surface.

The Church has us say, “To prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins.” How many of us repeat it when the Church asks us to say it! Simon felt all his smallness, pusillanimity, and pettiness when asked, “Simon, do you love me more than the others love me?” And he said, “Yes, Lord, I love you.” When he said, “Lord, you know everything, notwithstanding the appearances, notwithstanding all the appearances of me to myself, You know that I love you.” “I love you” means “I want You,” that is, “I affirm You, I recognize what You are for me and for everything.”

This is the overturning of moralism and of justice made with our hands: that such a poor sinner like us, one who had just betrayed

Him so indecently, as perhaps we have never done (at least, in our memory, not so blatantly)—loved him anyway. So, then the Lord told him: “I entrust my testimony in the world to you.”

He entrusted His testimony, His little sheep, His lambs, He entrusted His kingdom in the world to that miserable sinner.

CHAPTER 4

The Truth here and now



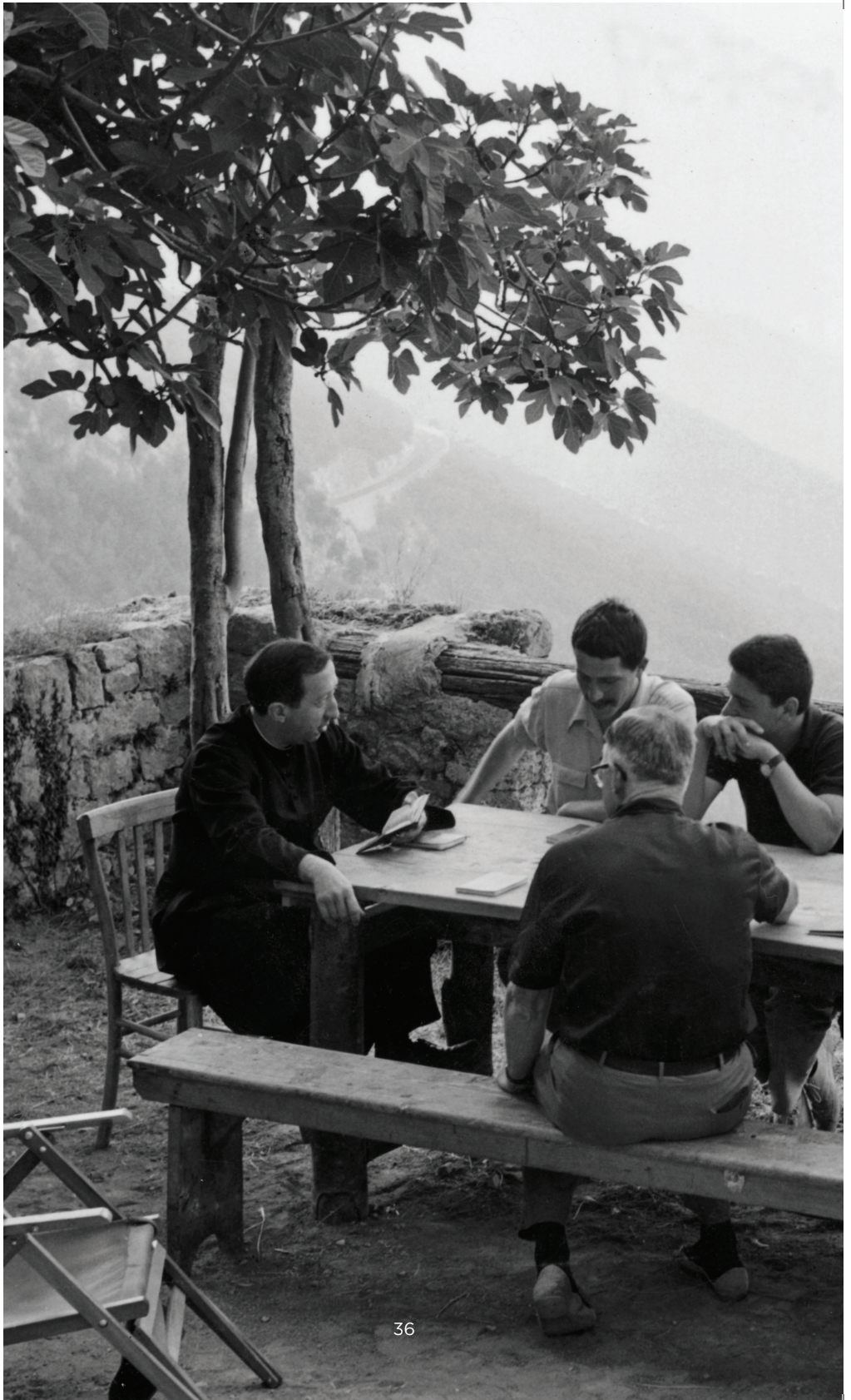
CHURCH: THE CONTINUATION OF CHRIST IN HISTORY

How can those who encounter Jesus Christ a day, a month, a hundred, a thousand, or two thousand years after His disappearance from earthly horizons, be enabled to realize that He corresponds to the truth which He claims? In other words, how does one come to see whether Jesus of Nazareth is or is not in a strict sense that event that incarnates the hypothesis of revelation?

This problem is at the heart of what history has always called Church. The word **“Church”** indicates a historical phenomenon whose only meaning lies in the fact that it enables man to attain a **certainty about Christ**.

A different humanity, the sign of the truth

Even when Jesus was at the height of His earthly activity, the event that he was assumed an identifiable form which was not merely His external physical appearance, but also that of those who believed in Him. The so-called Orthodox-Catholic approach shows us this method for reaching Jesus Christ even today, so that we can verify whether His great claim is true or not, whether He is God or not, whether the Christian message is true or not. This method is the chance encounter with a reality comprised of those who believe in Him. For the presence of Christ in history - the visible appearance - abides in the unity of believers, which is the encounterable form of His presence.



CHARISM: THE WAY THE LORD BECOMES EVENT FOR ME

The event happens today according to a specific form of time and space that enables us to face it in a certain way and makes it more understandable, more persuasive and more educationally effective. **This characteristic intervention of the Spirit of Christ, which makes possible the event existentially in time and space, is called a “charism.”**

A charism is precisely the mode of time, of space, of character, of temperament, and the psychological, affective, intellectual way in which the Lord becomes event for me, and for others in this same way. This way is communicated from me to others, so that between me and *these* people there is an affinity that is not there with everyone else; a stronger more specific bond of fraternity. **This is how Christ remains present amongst us every day, till the end of the world.**

FR. GIUSSANI AND ST. POPE JOHN PAUL II

Q: Let's talk about the relationship with Pope John Paul II. When in its journey did CL encounter the Pope?

Fr. Giussani: The first times we met the Pope were in Poland. Later, when he came to Italy, our relationship was easier because he already knew us. His way of approaching things beckons us, and abundantly confirms our way of approaching things. Once, in a speech for the 30th anniversary – for our 30th anniversary – the Pope said, verbatim: “Your way of approaching things is very similar to mine – in fact, I will say: it is the same.”

Q: And can you explain in a few words what this similarity is?

Fr. Giussani: That faith invests the totality of life. And, in investing the totality of life, it regulates the approach to things in such a way that the outcome from the human point of view is more human, is better.

THE REAL PROTAGONIST OF HISTORY

I shall try to say how an attitude was born in me – an attitude that God was to bless, as He wished – and that I could not have foreseen nor even wished for.

- 1) **“What is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?”** (Ps 8:5). **No question in life has ever struck me like this one. There has been only one Man in the world who could answer me, by asking another question, “What would it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and then loses himself? Or what could a man give in exchange for himself?”** (Mt 16:26; see Mk 8:36ff; Lk 9:25f). **I was never asked a question that took my breath away so much as this question of Christ's!** No woman ever heard another



voice speak of her son with such an original tenderness and unquestionable valuing of the fruit of her womb, with such a wholly positive affirmation of its destiny; only the voice of the Jew Jesus of Nazareth. And more than that, no man can feel his own dignity and absolute value affirmed far beyond all his achievements. No one in the world has ever been able to speak like this!

Only Christ takes my humanity so completely to heart. This is the wonder expressed by Dionysius the Areopagite (5th century): “Who could ever speak to us of the love that Christ has for man, overflowing with peace?” I’ve been repeating these words to myself for more than fifty years!

This is why Redemptor Hominis appeared on our horizon like a beam of light in the thick darkness covering the earth of present-day man, with all his confused questions.

Thank you, Your Holiness.

It was a simplicity of heart that made me feel and recognize Christ as exceptional, with that certain promptness that marks the unassailable and indestructible evidence of factors and moments of reality, which, on entering the horizon of our person, pierce us to the heart.

So the acknowledgment of who Christ is in our lives invades the whole of our awareness of living: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6).

“Domine Deus, in simplicitate cordis mei laetus obtuli universa” (“Lord God, in the simplicity of my heart I have gladly given You everything;” says the Offertory Prayer of the ancient Ambrosian Liturgy, for the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. What shows that this acknowledgement is true is the fact that life has an ultimate, tenacious capacity for gladness.

- 2) How can this gladness, which is the human glory of Christ, and which fills my heart and my voice in some moments, be found to be true and reasonable to today's man?

Because that Man, the Jew Jesus of Nazareth, died for us and rose again. That Risen Man is the Reality on which all the positivity of every man's existence depends.

Every earthly experience lived in the Spirit of Jesus, Risen from the dead, blossoms in Eternity. This blossoming will not bloom only at the end of time; it has already begun on the dawn of Easter. Easter is the beginning of this journey to the eternal Truth of everything, a journey that is therefore already within man's history.

For Christ, as the Word of God made flesh, makes Himself present as the Risen one in every period of time, throughout the whole of history, in order to reach from Easter morning to the end of this time, the end of this world. The Spirit of Jesus, that is to say of the Word made flesh, becomes an experience possible for ordinary man, in His power to redeem the whole existence of each person and human history, in the radical change that He produces in the one who encounters Him, and, like John and Andrew, follows Him.

Thus for me the grace of Jesus, in so far as I have been able to adhere to the encounter with Him and communicate Him to the brothers in God's Church, **has become the experience of a faith that in the Holy Church, that is to say the Christian People, revealed itself as a call and a desire to feed a new Israel of God:** "Populum Tuum vidi, cum ingenti gaudio, Tibi offerre donaria" ("With great joy, I saw your People, acknowledging existence as an offering to You"), continues the liturgical prayer.

So it was that I saw a people taking shape, in the name of Christ. Everything in me became truly more religious, with

my awareness striving to discover that “God is all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). In this people gladness was becoming “ingenti gaudio”, that is to say the decisive factor of one’s own history as ultimate positivity and therefore as joy. **What could have seemed at most to be an individual experience was becoming a protagonist in history, and so an instrument of the mission of the one People of God.** This now is the foundation of the search for an expressed unity among us.

- 3) That precious text of the Ambrosian Liturgy concludes with these words: “Domine Deus, custodi hanc voluntatem cordis eorum” (“Lord God, keep safe this attitude of their heart”). Infidelity always arises in our hearts even before the most beautiful and true things; the infidelity in which, before God’s humanity and man’s original simplicity, man can fall short, out of weakness and worldly preconception, like Judas and Peter. Even this personal experience of infidelity that always happens, revealing the imperfection of every human action, makes the memory of Christ more urgent.

The desperate cry of Pastor Brand in Ibsen’s play of the same name (“Answer me, O God, in the hour in which death is swallowing me up: is the whole of man’s will not enough to achieve even a part of salvation?”) is answered by the humble positivity of St Theresa of the Child Jesus who writes, “When I am charitable it is only Jesus who is acting in me.”

All this means that man’s freedom, which the Mystery always involves, has prayer as its supreme, unassailable expressive form. This is why freedom, according to the whole of its true nature, posits itself as an entreaty to adhere to Being, therefore to Christ. Even in man’s incapacity, in man’s great weakness, affection for Christ is destined to last.

In this sense Christ, Light and Strength for every one of his followers, is the adequate reflection of that word with which the Mystery appears in its ultimate relationship with

the creature, as mercy: Dives in Misericordia. The mystery of mercy shatters any image of complacency or despair; even the feeling of forgiveness lies within this mystery of Christ. This is the ultimate embrace of the Mystery, against which man—even the most distant, the most perverse or the most obscured, the most in the dark—cannot oppose anything, can make no objection. He can abandon it, but in so doing he abandons himself and his own good. **The Mystery as mercy remains the last word even on all the awful possibilities of history. For this reason existence expresses itself, as ultimate ideal, in begging. The real protagonist of history is the beggar: Christ who begs for man's heart, and man's heart that begs for Christ.**

IN THIS LIFE!

Fr. Giussani: Since our aim is to live better, we say that faith represents a working hypothesis that makes one live better – not in the afterlife, but in this life!

BIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE

▶ 1922

October 15: Luigi Giovanni Giussani was born in Desio (a small town in Brianza, north of Milan) to parents Angelina Gelosa and Beniamino Giussani.

▶ 1928

Begins elementary school.

▶ 1933

October 2: Enters the Diocesan seminary of St. Peter Martyr in Seveso.

▶ 1937

Moves to the seminary of Venegono.

▶ 1939

Forms a group with several seminarian friends, calling it “Studium Christi”.

▶ 1945

May 26: Is ordained a priest by Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster. He continues his license in Theology while teaching in the minor seminary of Seveso. In autumn, he begins pastoral work in a parish on the outskirts of Milan, which he later has to give up due to a severe respiratory disease.

▶ 1946

Beginning of long periods of recovery, which last until 1949.

▶ 1950

Having regained his health, he returns to teaching in the seminary and spends weekends doing pastoral work in a parish in Milan.

▶ 1951

Occasional meetings with high school students inspire a growing desire to dedicate his life to educating young people.

▶ 1954

Continues his doctorate in Theology with a thesis on Reinhold Niebuhr’s Understanding of the Christian Meaning of Man. He begins teaching religion at the Berchet high school in Milan. In the following years he begins teaching also in other schools.

▶ 1955

He is appointed Diocesan Assistant to Gioventù Studentesca (GS), or “Student Youth” the pastoral outreach for high school students.

▶ 1957

He involves all of GS in the Mission to the City initiated by Archbishop Montini. Guiding GS, he renews its educational proposal. He also involves GS students in an activity aimed to educate them to charity called “Charitable Work”. The Charitable Work takes place in Bassa, an economically depressed neighborhood of Milan.

▶ 1958

A group forms around Giussani, the heart of which would later mature into the Memores Domini, an association of consecrated lay faithful who live in community.

▶ 1960

Makes his first visit to Brazil, harbinger of the departure of the first GS students who would travel to Brazil as missionaries.

▶ 1964

Begins teaching Introduction to Theology at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan.

▶ 1965

Spends the summer in the United States to study the formation and organization of various parish activities. Upon his return to Italy, he leaves the leadership of GS, where the first signs emerge of the crisis that would reach its peak in 1968.

- ▶ **1967**
Leaves his teaching post at Berchet high school.
- ▶ **1968**
In the months marked by student protests throughout Italy, he lays the groundwork for a renewal of what later would become the CL Movement.
- ▶ **1969**
The name “Communion and Liberation” appears for the first time.
- ▶ **1971**
Oversees the founding of the Benedictine monastery at Cascinazza (outside Milan). Meets with the Archbishop of Krakow, Poland, Karol Wojtyła. Meets the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar and, through him, Joseph Ratzinger.
- ▶ **1975**
Begins a friendship with a group of Spanish families, who would begin the CL community in Spain. On Palm Sunday, March 23, participates in the pilgrimage initiated by Paul VI along with the Movement. Meets with the Holy Father after the event.
- ▶ **1976**
Participates in the Equipe of the leaders of CL University students (CLU), which would be a turning point in the history of the Movement.
- ▶ **1979**
January 18: is received by John Paul II. March 31: Attends the first audience with John Paul II with the CLU students.
- ▶ **1981**
The Memores Domini is recognized by the bishop of Piacenza, Bishop Enrico Manfredini.
- ▶ **1982**
February 11: The Pontifical Council for the Laity officially recognizes the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, with Giussani as the founder and president for life.
- ▶ **1983**
Is named a Monsignor by John Paul II.
- ▶ **1984**
Leads the CL community in a pilgrimage to Rome for an audience with John Paul II marking the 30th anniversary of the birth of the Movement.
- ▶ **1985**
Participates in a meeting in Avila, Spain, with the cultural association Nueva Tierra. Fr. Julián Carrón was one of the leaders of the association. In September, Nueva Tierra decides to join CL, and they attend an audience with John Paul II with the priests of CL. Giussani also oversees the founding of the Priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo.
- ▶ **1986**
Makes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.
- ▶ **1987**
Speaks at the Assembly of the Christian Democratic Party of Lombardy in Assago (Milan). Travels to Japan to meet a prominent Japanese Buddhist, Shodo Habukawa. Participates in the Synod of Bishops on the Laity as a member appointed by the Holy Father.
- ▶ **1988**
The Memores Domini are recognized by the Holy See as a Private Universal Ecclesial Association, with Giussani as the founder and president for life.
- ▶ **1990**
Begins a path of discernment with a group of individuals that would become the Fraternity of St. Joseph, an association of consecrated lay people.
- ▶ **1991**
Ends his time teaching at the Catholic University in Milan, having reached the mandatory retirement age.

- ▶ **1992**
Leads a pilgrimage to Lourdes for the 10th anniversary of the Pontifical recognition of the Fraternity of CL.
- ▶ **1993**
The Holy See recognizes the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption, a branch of an order to which he was connected since 1958. Begins directing the new “Books of the Christian Spirit” series published by Rizzoli, which would include over 80 books.
- ▶ **1995**
Begins publishing articles in secular newspapers in Italy, including il Giornale, la Repubblica, and Corriere della Sera. Receives the Catholic Culture prize from the School of Catholic Culture in Bassano del Grappa, in Veneto.
- ▶ **1997**
Begins directing the musical collection “Spirto Gentil” through an agreement with Deutsche Grammophon and other record labels. The series begins with a recording of Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater and would include 52 other works. The English version of his book *The Religious Sense* is presented at the United Nations in New York.
- ▶ **1998**
May 30: Gives an address in St. Peter’s Square during the meeting of John Paul II with Ecclesial Movements and new communities.
- ▶ **2002**
February 11: Receives a long letter signed by John Paul II on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Pontifical recognition of the Fraternity of CL.
- ▶ **2003**
On the occasion of the funerals of the members of the Italian military killed in the Nasiriya bombing, his message is read during the evening news of the public Italian TV station.
- ▶ **2004**
For the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Movement, he sends his last letter to John Paul II. Receives permission from the Archbishop of Madrid for Fr. Julián Carrón to move to Milan to collaborate with him in guiding CL. October: writes his last letter to the entire CL Movement on the occasion of the pilgrimage to Loreto, which marks the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Movement. Late December: his health begins to decline rapidly.
- ▶ **2005**
February 22: Dies in his home in Milan. February 24: The funeral Mass is celebrated in Milan’s cathedral (the Duomo) by then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, as the personal representative of John Paul II. He also gives the homily. Giussani is buried in the Famedio section of Milan’s Monumentale Cemetery, reserved for the city’s accomplished citizens.
- ▶ **2008**
His tomb is transferred to a separate chapel built for him in the same cemetery.
- ▶ **2012**
February 22: at the end of the Mass celebrated in Milan’s Duomo on the seventh anniversary of his death, President of the Fraternity of CL Fr. Julián Carrón, announces that he has presented the request to open the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Msgr. Giussani. The request is accepted by the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Angelo Scola.

REFERENCES

TEXTS

Throughout the booklet, all quotes of Fr. Giussani are shown in black font.

Chapter 1: Fr. Giussani and the Communion and Liberation movement

- Unedited transcription of an interview with Fr. Giussani, conducted by Chiara Beria di Argentine, 1987

Chapter 2: How can we reach truth?

A problem of method:

- *The Risk of Education* (The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2001), Introduction
- *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006)

What does Fr. Giussani mean by elementary experience?

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The dynamism of reason

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Reason yearns to know the unknown

- *The Religious Sense*, Chapters 11, 14, 15

The example of Ulysses

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A vertiginous position

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The hypothesis of revelation

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Chapter 3: The Truth became flesh

The inversion of the religious method

- *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), Chapter 3

The Christian event has the form of an encounter

- *Generating Traces in the History of the World* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), Chapter 1
- *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, Introduction

Mary

- Excerpt from the conference "Mary in the mystery of Christ and of the Church", Faenza, May 2, 1988

John and Andrew

- Excerpt from “Recognizing Christ”, spiritual exercises of the university students of Communion and Liberation, Rimini, December 10, 1994

Zacchaeus

- Excerpt from “Experiencing Christ in a real and historical relationship”, spiritual exercises of the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Rimini, April 29, 1987

Peter

- Excerpt from “It is necessary to suffer so that the truth does not crystallize in doctrine but is born from the flesh”, spiritual exercises of the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Rimini, April 29, 1989

Chapter 4: The Truth here and now**Church: the continuation of Christ in history**

- *Why the Church?* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), Chapters 1,2

Charism: the way the Lord becomes event for me

- *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, Chapter 2

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- Unedited transcription of an interview with Fr. Giussani, conducted by Chiara Beria di Argentine, 1987

The real protagonist of history

- Fr. Giussani’s testimony during the meeting of the Holy Father John Paul II with the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities. St Peter’s Square, Rome, May 30, 1998.

In this life!

- Unedited transcription of an interview with Fr. Giussani, conducted by Chiara Beria di Argentine, 1987

PHOTOS

Cover page

- Varigotti, 1975: Fr. Giussani (Fraternita' di Comunione e Liberazione "FCL")

Introduction

- San Remo, 1990s: Fr. Giussani (FCL / Amabile Lanfredini)

Chapter 1: Fr. Giussani and the Communion and Liberation movement

- Desio, May 31, 1945: Fr. Giussani with some young people on the day of his first Mass (FCL)
- Milan, 1963: A meeting of high school students at the Via Statuto 2, GS center (FCL)

Chapter 2: How can we reach truth?

- Milan, 1983: Fr. Giussani (Federico Brunetti)
- 1987: Fr. Giussani (Fotogramma)
- Desio, May 31, 1945: Fr. Giussani riding the bike he received as a gift on the occasion of his first Mass (FCL)
- Portofino, September 1956: Fr. Giussani with students on a trip to the lighthouse during Student Week (FCL)

Chapter 3: The Truth became flesh

- Milan, 1980s: Fr. Giussani at the chalkboard (FCL)
- Varigotti, October 1958: Morning prayer on the beach during Student Week (Photo by Elio Ciol, Casarsa)

Chapter 4: The Truth here and now

- Varigotti, September 1961: RADIUS gathering of high school students at the Varigotti tower ruins during Student Week (Photo by Elio Ciol, Casarsa)
- Subiaco, Hermitage of Blessed Lorenzo Loricato: Fr. Giussani and the painter William Congdon conversing with young people (Photo by Elio Ciol, Casarsa)
- Vatican City, Saint Peter's Square, May 30, 1998: Fr. Giussani kneels before Pope John Paul II during the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities (L'Osservatore Romano photographic services / Arturo Mari)

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THE JOURNEY TO THE TRUTH

**An exhibit on the Servant of God Fr. Luigi Giussani
on the centennial of his birth**

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- **Carlo Lancellotti**
- **Maria Teresa Landi**
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