



# AN ORIGINAL PRESENCE

**Notes from Julián Carrón's address at the Assembly with the responsables  
of Communion and Liberation in Italy.  
Pacengo di Lazise, Italy, February 27, 2016.**

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**I**t is obvious to everyone that we are in a time of great changes and that is not easy to navigate in the current cultural context. We are facing a great turning point that requires patience and time to understand, without thinking that we can solve problems by just discussing them. The pages that follow are intended to contribute to the journey of each and every person, for a dialogue amongst us.

Two weeks ago, during a meeting with a group of priests in northern Italy, one of them said that what we are experiencing is “a really exciting time.” I think this is true, because everything that the Mystery does not spare us, as Fr. Giussani always told us, is to bring us to maturity. Although we do not yet know how it might make us mature and we are a bit confused, we are confident that this circumstance can be a valuable opportunity, linked as it is to the debate on the ethical and anthropological challenges posed by the proliferation of “new human rights,” with all the questions that have arisen, and with all the sometimes heated dialogues that we have dealt with. Only when reality challenges us does what we hold most dear, where our hope lies, emerge before our eyes and before all the others. The more we are challenged, the more the unitary point of view with which we face life becomes clear.

Now, this situation is indeed for our maturation, but not in a mechanical way. So we must commit ourselves to understanding it, allowing it to challenge us. Since it has touched everyone, we can all look at how we have faced it, at how we have reacted. In one way or another we have all reacted. We can look at the hypothesis we have defended and the verification we undertook. Each of us must carry out a verification, but not to come up with ideas, which is of course a good thing (I for one will not withdraw from the battle). But many times we have come up with ideas that life showed to be not as smart as we thought. So we will have to give ourselves a space of serenity for a truly constructive dialogue.

**THE LESSON OF 1968: THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN EVENT AND TRADITION**

What wealth, what resources do we have for facing the new challenges of the present? We have our history. Often we think we know it already, we take it for granted, or each of us remembers a few moments of it. But the chal-

lenges of the present make us discover aspects of this history that perhaps we have yet to learn.

Why did Fr. Giussani begin the Movement? In the Church of Milan there was certainly no lack of theological clarity and communication of dogma. But he realized that this was not enough. He understood it from his first steps in Milan and then on his arrival at the Berchet High School. He was faced with students of Christian families, students who were no longer interested in the faith. This discovery marked the beginning of his efforts. Fr. Giussani began the Movement to respond to this fact, by looking for a way to communicate the Christian truth—which he had learned in the seminary—which responded to the lack of interest he encountered from the first day of class. We are talking about the mid-1950s.

There is however a later moment in history, one that was crucial for Fr. Giussani: 1968. In the summer of 1968, he spoke at the Spiritual Exercises of the *Memoires Domini*, and he stated, “It seems to me a sign of the times that the discourse on tradition, that [Christian] history is no longer, nor can be, the basis of an appeal to and a belonging to the Christian fact.... It will be necessary to radically review everything we have been saying over the last ten years and that we still repeat.” I think we have yet to understand the full extent of this observation. The tidal wave of 1968 caused Giussani to reach the clarity that neither “tradition, a theory, a concept nor speculation can be a reason to adhere to Christianity; not Christian phi-

losophy, Christian theology, nor the Christian worldview.” And, referring to the Gospels, he adds, “It was not because of the speeches He gave or because of His explanations; it was not because of His appeals to the Old Testament. It was because He was a presence that bore a message,” that the people followed Jesus. “The message is not words. It is a presence, a person. It is a person’s way of being a presence.” And in order to be clear he adds, “It is quite easy to see how the announcement recovers tradition.... Let us recall the two travelers of Emmaus, one of the most beautiful pages of the Gospel. “While that strange pilgrim explained the prophets to us, our hearts were reawakened.” So, yes, the Christian announcement is “words” but “through presence, linked to the presence of a person.” The content of the Christian proclamation “was His very person,” Christ. (A. Savorana, *Vita di don*

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*Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery.*

*Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani], BUR, Milan, 2014, pp. 404-405). Without this, most likely none of us would be here.*

So what is Christianity? “It is that ‘thing’ which makes tradition, what is past, into a living reality. It makes thought, ideas and values into something living. But ‘living’ means present! So as a method the best thing we can do—if we do not confuse each other—is to return to the origin, to how it arose, how it began.... It was an event. Christianity is an event” that joins the past to the present. What kind of event is this? “They did not believe because Christ spoke by saying those things. They did not believe because Christ performed those miracles. They did not believe because Christ quoted the prophets. They did not believe because Christ raised the dead. How many people—the vast majority—heard Him speak like that, heard Him say those words, saw Him do those miracles, people for whom the event did not happen?” At this point, Fr. Giussani asks why, then, did Jesus’ first disciples believe? “They believed because of a presence.” “A presence with a very specific face, a presence full of words, i.e., bearing a proposal, bringing meaning.” Not every person or reality

is a presence, continues Giussani. It is so “only insofar as it has something unexpected and unpredictable, i.e., something radically new.” In fact, “Christianity was born as a proclamation: the experience of something irreducibly new” (*ibid*, pp. 407-408).

Let us try to put ourselves in Fr. Giussani’s place. In 1968 he could have pretended that nothing had happened and continued on his merry way. But he did not. Why? Because for him, “the circumstances,” as we have always said, are an “essential factor” of our vocation. The circumstance in which one takes a position in front of the whole world “is important to the very definition of witness” (L. Giussani, *L’uomo e il suo destino [Man and His Destiny]*, Marietti 1820, Milan, 1999, p. 63). He accepted the call to conversion that came from reality and it made him open to be challenged, without being attached to the forms of the past, as he did from the beginning. In order to communicate the newness of Christianity he had insisted on certain things that did not fit the usual way of communicating the faith of the Church in Milan. For example, his appeal to experience, >>

» and therefore, the need for verification, or having boys and girls together in the “radius” meetings. The more attached he was to the essentials, the more this made him free with respect to forms. In this way he was a witness to what Pope Francis reminded us in Rome on March 7, 2015, namely that “Never in history is Christianity realized as a fixity of positions to defend, which relates to the new as pure antithesis; Christianity is the principle of redemption, which takes on the new, preserving it” (L. Giussani, *Porta la speranza [Bring Hope]*, Marietti 1820, Genova, 1997, p. 119).

This is why I attach decisive importance to this circumstance, which we have gone through and are still going through, because given all that has happened it is crucial to defining our witness. The big brawl broke out over the topic of civil unions [in Italy] because of individual attempts to define what our witness should be now. This is what people are debating to the point of argument. Therefore we cannot move forward unless we achieve a radical clarity about this.

In my opinion the first issue is to clarify what a judgment is, because we often think that to judge means to take sides. But the Gospel records the fact that on many occasions Jesus made judgments in a way that did not involve taking sides. Think of the episode of the tribute to Caesar. They want Him to take one side or the other in order to corner Him. Jesus does not give a judgment that will satisfy those who want to force Him into one camp or the other—either You say You must pay taxes to Caesar and so you are a Roman collaborator, or You declare that You should not pay and therefore You are anti-Roman. Jesus does not take sides. “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (*Lk 20:25*). In this episode Jesus judges the relationship between politics and religion, and His enigmatic answer was the foundation of something irreducibly new in understanding the role of power in society for the next twenty centuries. He catches His questioners off guard even when dealing with other elementary dimensions of common experience. When He speaks of marriage—the realization of the affections—or when He warns about wealth—namely the right use of material goods—His opponents are not the only ones stunned. Even His disciples are completely overcome, almost scandalized, by the originality of his proposal. Regarding the indissolubility of marriage, they exclaim, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient

to marry” (*Mt 19:10*). While in the second case, hearing Jesus say, “Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,” “the disciples were astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’” (*Mt 19:24-25*). No one will deny that Jesus makes specific judgments, albeit differently from the expectations of those who engage Him. The fact that they are upset is proof. To respond to the disproportion people feel at His proposal, Jesus is forced to play a card that makes His presence original *vis-a-vis* the simplistic, partisan attitudes of both His opponents and His very disciples. “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (*Mt 19:26*). Thus He reveals His self-awareness, His identity to everyone. We could go on with the facts like this until tomorrow!

It is possible to give relevant judgments that do not imply taking sides or being reduced to a partisan position. With regard to the issue of civil unions, our decisive judgment was to recall the mystery of man taken in his totality, which is documented by the infinite expectation of the human heart. That is why a real human being does not find peace, is restless, and will never be able to settle for a reduced image in answer to his desire. Only if we give a judgment that reaches this point can we address the law, because we say that however the law is approved, it will always be insufficient to meet the infinite desire proper to man.

In the face of what happened, all of us, either implicitly or explicitly, have given a judgment, through our way of acting and our way of responding. Just as a doctor reveals his diagnosis in attempting to cure the disease, so each of us was able to see our own judgment on the human drama behind the issue of the Italian civil unions law. It is precisely because of the judgment I expressed about man and his nature that the only answer for me is Christ. But Christ not defined in the abstract, but as a living encounter, like the encounter of the Samaritan woman at the well, like the one mentioned by Fr. Giussani, because “in a society like this, you cannot create something new if not with life” (“Movimento, ‘regola’ di libertà” [“Movement, ‘Rule’ of Freedom,” O. Grassi, ed., *CL Litterae communionis*, no. 11/1978, p. 44]). Christ is not a part of the solution. He is the only solution that I believe in. Only if you understand this, can you somewhat “demystify” the legislative effort and open a space for meeting and dialogue, even for politicians. I shall return to this point.

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**A REACTIVE PRESENCE**

In our own history, the way we faced the challenge of 1968 is a clear example of what we are saying. Fr. Giussani formulated a judgment and incessantly proposed it, a judgment that was not identified with any of the various factions involved. He put into question not only the Marxist proposition, but also our own efforts to answer the challenge posed by Marxism. Why this comparison between today and '68? Because, as Cardinal Scola pointed out, "Dealing with the sexual revolution [we are now experiencing] is a challenge, perhaps no less than the one launched by the Marxist revolution" ("Il no ai divorziati resta, ma non è un castigo e sugli omosessuali la Chiesa è stata lenta." ["The 'No' to the Divorced Stands, but not as a Punishment; On Homosexuals the Church has Been Slow"], Interview by P. Rodari, *la Repubblica*, October 12, 2014, p. 19). They are variants of the same issue, two attempts at self-salvation.

What judgment did Fr. Giussani make about the direction our efforts to meet the challenge of 1968 had taken? He said that we responded by taking the same criterion of judgment of those whom we criticized, copying the thinking of others. He was certainly not equating Marxism with our efforts at a response, but he was judging both attempts as coming from the same cultural matrix, because in the early '70s the Movement's answer to 1968 accepted the playing field defined by Marxism. "The success [of the]... Palalido gathering was... at the origin of a misunderstanding, destined for some time to exert a not entirely positive influence over the life and development of the Movement. In the wake of this success... the activities of the Communion and Liberation leadership began to be geared toward demonstrating and implementing the possible positive value of a Christian way of facing the issues brought to the fore by 1968. In other words, we undertook to propose the specifics of the Christian fact, but only within the limits predetermined by others" (L. Giussani, *Il movimento di Comunione e Liberazione. 1954-1986. [The Communion and Liberation Movement. 1954-1986]*, BUR, Milan, 2014, p. 169).

Fr. Giussani recognized the demand for truth within Marxism, because "even the Marxist expressed a need of the heart, albeit confused, obscured, dilapidated by an ideological discourse" (*In cammino. 1992-1998 [On the Way. 1992-1998]*, BUR, Milan, 2014, p. 216). But precisely because he recognized the truth of the need that was behind that ideological effort, he keenly realized the in-

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adequacy of our proposal. Therefore, if we do not understand the need that stirs in what happens today, our efforts will be—as they were then—reduced, and our response inadequate.

Therefore, in 1972, very close to the events in question, he stopped to judge the jolt of 1968. He said that they had tried to overcome "bewilderment... through... a will to action, operation, activity,... plunging headlong into following the world" (cf. L. Giussani, "The Long March to Maturity," *Traces*, n. 3/2008, p. 26), in an effort and a claim to change things by their own efforts, just like the others. In 1993, in retrospect, Fr. Giussani repeats the same judgment of those years. "We were taken by the thrill of doing, of being able to achieve responses and actions where we could show others that, by acting according to Christian principles, we could outdo them.

This was the only way that we, too, could have a homeland" (*In cammino. 1992-1998 [On the Way. 1992-1998]*, op. cit., p. 219). Accepting the terrain defined by others produced a huge mobilization, but also unpredictable consequences. What were those consequences? Without us knowing it, there was "the transition from one matrix to another matrix, [from Christianity to moralism] ...minimizing and making the words we used and the experience we took part in as abstract as possible." In this way "a reduction or nullification of the historical depth of the Christian fact took place, causing it to 'fade,' emptying it as much as possible of historical impact." Because that is just how it often seems to us: that the Christian fact as such has no historical impact. Consequently, if it has no impact, we need to mobilize and do something else to respond to the situation. This had three consequences, which Giussani describes as follows: 1) "A conception of Christian engagement focused on efficiency, with accents of moralism. And not just 'accents,' full reduction to moralism!" Christianity changes its face. Instead of a fact, it becomes moralism, ethics. In this we see the reduction of man that has taken place, because whoever understands that man is desire for the infinite, certainly does not pretend to solve his problem with ethics. When one tries to answer with moralism, it means that he has already reduced the person. 2) "The inability to convert words into culture, to bring our own Christian experience to the level where it becomes systematic and critical judgment, and thus the suggestion of how to act." So a different culture does not arise, but we adopt the same moralistic culture as Marxism: >>



» “Here I come to set things right.” 3) “The theoretical and practical undervaluing of the experience... of authority” (cf. L. Giussani, “The Long March to Maturity,” *Traces*, op. cit., pp. 25-26).

Tell me if Fr. Giussani’s judgment is not clear. “In the general confusion... [what dominated was] a headlong plunge into following the world. Our history and its valuable content were minimized, interpreted as much as possible according to an abstract version and not life. They were ousted, ostracized from the possibility of an impact on the contingent moment and therefore from a true incarnation.” And how does he define this effort? Referring to the overall attitude of those who promoted and participated in the movements of ’68, he says, “It is the naiveté of me, ‘the measure of all things.’ It is the naiveté of man who says, ‘Here I come to set things right’.... What melancholy! What melancholy we immediately felt, and how it became deeper with the passing years” (*ibid*, pp. 26-27, 23).

It is naiveté and presumption, (and we too have participated and participate in it) as Pope Francis also pointed out in his address to the conference of the Italian Church, in Florence, when he spoke of the Pelagian temptation. “It spurs the Church not to be humble, disinterested and blessed. It does so through the appearance of something good. Pelagianism leads us to trust in structures, in organizations, in planning that is perfect because it is abstract. Often it also leads us to assume a controlling, harsh and normative manner. Norms give Pelagianism the security of feeling superior, of having a precise bearing. This is where it finds its strength” (Francis, *Meeting with the Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church*, Florence, November 10, 2015).

This is a reduction of Christianity. According to Fr. Giussani, this is how “talk on moral values takes hold, because talking about moral values implies that the remedy... comes from man’s imagination and willpower” (“È sempre una grazia,” [“It is Always a Grace”] in *È, se opera*, [*He Is if He Changes*], suppl. *30Giorni*, February 1994, p. 59). It may be a law, a mass mobilization, or whatever else we can imagine. This is the radical correction that Fr. Giussani makes. And what is the ultimate reason for this attitude denounced by Fr. Giussani? “It is an existential insecurity, an underlying fear, that conceives of its strength, as the reason for its consistency, in cultural or organizational things we do” (*Uomini senza patria. 1982-1983* [*Men without a Homeland. 1982-1983*], BUR, Milan, 2008, p.

97). So we tell ourselves that we have to do something.

With this set of observations, spread over the years, what is Fr. Giussani judging? A certain form of collective presence of the Movement as such. He not is judging one individual or another. Therefore the argument that was triggered in recent weeks over the question of private or public testimony, is distracting, because the real issue is the content of the testimony—individual or communitarian—because witness, when it is witness, is always public. Giussani is judging the ultimate content of our presence and our action, which had been reduced to moralism, to promotion or demonstration of Christian values. For this reason, in 1982, he spoke to university students and said that “it is as if the Communion and Liberation Movement, from 1970 onwards, had worked, built and fought for the values that Christ brought, while for us, for our people and for all those who made up CL with us, the fact of Christ ‘had remained something parallel” (*ibid*, p. 56).

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What Giussani was unmasking was a type of public presence resulting from an overarching, dominant morality, a collective presence that was the fruit of an “existential insecurity.” We have so often—wrongly—called this “presence” (in its original sense). Thus Giussani says, “As long as Christianity is defined as the dialectical and practical support of Christian values, it finds space and hospitality everywhere. But where the Christian is the man who announces within human, historical reality the permanent presence... of God made one of us, the subject of experience, ... actively determining as the total horizon, as the ultimate love...,

[in other words] the presence of Christ as the center of his way of seeing, of seeing and facing life, the meaning of every action, the source of all human activity, that is to say the cultural activities of humankind, this man has no homeland” (*ibid*, p. 90). As it happens even today: if we were to reduce Christianity to the dialectical affirmation of Christian values, we would have a homeland.

#### **AN ORIGINAL PRESENCE**

Why does Fr. Giussani insist so much and for so long on correcting our efforts? Because ours cannot be a reactive presence, one that simply takes one side or another. It must become an original presence, because “a reactive presence... tends to become... an *imitation* of others... it is like playing on their home field, accepting the fight on their terms,” that is, the territory defined by another. “What therefore is needed is an *original presence*” (L.



*The Pietà.*

Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza. 1975-1978* [*From Utopia to Presence. 1975-1978*], BUR, Milan, 2006, p. 52). This is very different from taking sides, and it does not mean not having a position. It means taking a different position and in no way retreating into the sacristy!

An original judgment, an original presence, cannot be reduced to partisan logic, even though it enters into specifics, down to the details. At the gathering of university students in Riccione, Italy in 1976, Fr. Giussani describes what constitutes an original presence. “A presence is original when it springs from awareness of one’s own identity and affection for it, and that is where it finds consistency.... *Our identity is to be one with Christ*” (*ibid*, pp. 52, 54). Why is an original presence necessary? Because of man’s historical situation, which the Church has constantly been aware of. Because life’s elementary evidence is not perceived clearly. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “The precepts of natural law are not perceived by everyone clearly and immediately. In the present situation sinful man needs grace and revelation so moral and religious truths may be known ‘by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1960). This is increasingly clear today, but the whole history of the

Church shows this perception of the human condition. How can we expect to offer a contribution to the struggles of people today without being aware of the drama of their historical situation? If Christ does not awaken man, if He does not stir up the full awareness of what man is, it is impossible for him to clearly and directly know the most elementary evidence. And who should understand it better than us, because none of us would be here if this had not happened to us.

So what is the answer to this situation? In the way we answer, as I said before, we show whether we really understood the point and if the diagnosis of the problem is correct. When Giussani insists that we have nothing more to say to the current challenge than “John and Andrew,” the encounter of John and Andrew with Jesus, is he saying something spiritualistic? When he states that “the person discovers himself in a living encounter” (*L’io rinasce in un incontro. 1986-1987* [*The Self is Reborn in an Encounter. 1986-1987*], BUR, Milan, 2010, p. 182), is he giving a private, individualistic answer to the human problem? This is often what we say or think. “Yes, that’s fine, we already know that, but now let’s be practical.” But how can you bring a person to clarity without an encounter? It is from an encounter that full self-perception, new >>





*The Three Women at the Tomb.*

» creativity and knowledge spring, impacting all areas of personal and social life.

Precisely because he is aware of the historical situation, Fr. Giussani felt that in a context like that of the 1970s, the [Italian] referendum on divorce was not useful, as he himself says in the interview edited by Robi Ronza. “We accepted the invitation of Bishop Bartoletti... out of obedience to ecclesiastical authority. For its part, in fact, CL would not have been fully in agreement on the usefulness of such an initiative under those circumstances” (*Il movimento di Comunione e Liberazione. 1954-1986* [*The Communion and Liberation Movement. 1954-1986*], op. cit., pp. 170-171). And not because he had changed his mind about marriage, but because, if one understands the nature of the problem, he can believe that some initiatives are not useful under certain circumstances. Giussani had not suddenly become a relativist or a secularist, questioning the importance of the public defense of marriage, let alone the Church’s doctrine on it. His was a historical judgment. He had realized what was happening in society before anyone else. So much so that, in the 1950s, in order to respond to the challenge which saw emerging, he created the Movement.

Only if we take stock of the situation can we realistically understand how operate in the world. This is what it means: to judge, make a proper diagnosis of the concrete, historical human situation.

In 1998, toward the end of his life, Fr. Giussani returned to these things. Someone asked him, “Why does a Movement like ours insist so much on the self, and why this insistence only now?” He replied, “The beginning of the Movement was dominated by the problem of the person!” (*In cammino. 1992-1998* [*On the Way. 1992-1998*], op. cit., pp. 337-338). But to us this often seems insufficient, while for Giussani is the only worthwhile thing. “When in fact the grip of an adversarial society tightens around us and threatens the vitality of our expression, and when a cultural and social hegemony strives to penetrate the heart, magnifying our natural uncertainties, then *the time of the person has arrived.*” And what is the person? Where is its consistency? Ultimately this is the decisive question. “What is necessary for the person to exist, for the human subject to have vigor in this situation in which everything is ripped from the trunk to create dry leaves, is *self-awareness*, a clear and loving perception of self, full of knowledge of one’s own destiny and,



therefore, capable of true affection for oneself, freed from the instinctive stupidity of self-love. If we lose this identity, nothing else can help us” (“È venuto il tempo della persona” [“The Time of the Person has Arrived”], L. Cioni, ed., *Litterae Communionis CL*, n. 1/1977, pp. 11-12). Since we live in a society like the one we all know, an absolutely pluralistic society, the only bulwark against power is an “I” whose self awareness allows it to live in this context without succumbing to the seductions of power.

As Pope Francis says, “We come from a centuries-old pastoral practice, in which the Church has been the single point of reference for culture... it is our legacy... We are no longer in that time [whether we like it or not]. We are no longer in Christendom; no more. Today we are no longer the only ones who produce culture, nor the first ones, nor the most listened to. We therefore need a change in pastoral mentality... because men, women, families and the different groups living in the cities expect from us and need the Good News that is Jesus and his Gospel” (Francis, *Address to Participants at the International Pastoral Congress on the World’s Big Cities*, November 27, 2014, 1). This does not mean yielding to relativism, but recognizing that the situation has changed.

On what does the understanding of people today depend? Only on the fact that we can witness to the faith, either individually or communally, but in a convincing way. In the words of Cardinal Ratzinger in 2003, “It is for the sake of man and for the world. And neither of them, it is clear, can be saved unless God reappears in a convincing fashion. No one can claim to be sure of the way to deal with this emergency. That is impossible, if only because in a free society truth can find no other way to prevail, and should seek no other way than simply by power of persuasion; yet persuasion can only be achieved with difficulty amid the multitude of pressures and demands to which people are subjected” (Benedict XVI, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2005, p. 144). And in another text he proposes an example to clarify his thought. “Allow me... to illustrate this, too, with an example, in which the whole drama of the issue becomes evident. The debate... over crucifixes in schools.... When we no longer have the strength to understand and adhere to such signs in their indispensability, then Christianity makes itself dispensable.... Therefore, Christianity must insist on such public signs of its humanity.... But of course it can insist on them only if the force of public

opinion supports them. This presents a challenge to us. If we are not convinced and cannot convince others, then we have no right to demand public visibility, either. Then we are dispensable, and then we have to admit it, too. But then we, by our own lack of conviction, deprive society of what is objectively indispensable for it: the spiritual foundations of its humanity and its freedom. The only strength with which Christianity can make its influence felt publicly is ultimately the strength of its intrinsic truth. This strength, though, is as indispensable today as it ever was, because man cannot survive without truth. That is the sure hope of Christianity; that is its enormous challenge to each and every one of us.” (J. Ratzinger, “A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy?,” *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2008, pp. 207-208).

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Since there is no relationship with the truth that does not pass through freedom, the challenge is to witness the inner truth of Christianity so as to persuade people of its relevance to the needs of daily life. Otherwise will be difficult to convince anyone. This is why Giussani always recalled the three essential dimensions of the Christian message: culture, charity and mission, understood as the “*level of openness towards all of reality that a human gesture accomplishes*.” It allows us to glimpse an ultimate meaning in any endeavor. Dimensions thus represent the most important aspect of a gesture, those that measure: (see ‘*dimetior*’: Latin) the value of a gesture, and those that carry out all of its potential” (L. Giussani, *The*

*Journey to Truth is an Experience*, McGill-Queens, Montreal, 2006, p. 19). We will come back another time to the integral education that develops these dimensions, bearing in mind that it is only made possible by the reoccurrence of the encounter, that is, of the original newness, which broadens reason and expands affection, by harmonizing them with a proposal that can change all human energies to the point of generating a new personality. In fact, the new creature implies “being contemporary with the event that generates it and continually sustains it. Since this origin is not an idea, but a place, a living reality, the new judgment is possible only in an on-going relationship with this reality; in other words with the human companionship that prolongs in time the initial Event” (L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queens, Montreal, 2010, p. 54).

Each of us must verify the effectiveness of the way we act in reality. We must observe whether reducing **>>**



*The Resurrection.*

» Christianity to words or culture, to ethics or values, detached from the irreducible originality of an encounter, is able to convince a person to change position. In 1968 Giussani learned just that—that a good course in anthropology was not enough; that good theology was not enough; ethics was not enough. Therefore, now just as then, the circumstances in which we live are an amazing opportunity to understand what Christianity is. John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, “This effort by the Church finds its support—the ‘secret’ of its educative power—not so much in doctrinal statements and pastoral appeals to vigilance, as in constantly looking to the Lord Jesus. Each day the Church looks to Christ with unfailing love, fully aware that the true and final answer to the problem of morality lies in Him alone... It is urgent to rediscover and to set forth once more the authentic reality of the Christian faith, which is not simply a set of propositions to be accepted with intellectual

assent. Rather, faith is a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of His commandments, and a truth to be lived out” (Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993, 85 and 88). In other words, it is the communication of an experience.

If we do not get to the bottom of all these things, we cannot propose something original. We will only repeat some of the reduced ways of understanding Christianity.

It is as if we still need to learn the vision that Vatican II introduced into the Church of God. And it is significant that people, when they face challenges like the present, come across texts that acquire a value for all. Thus, more than one person has sent me the address by Paul VI at the last public session of the Council, in December of 1965. I propose here some passages. “Never before perhaps, so much as on this occasion, has the Church felt the need to know, to draw near to, to understand, to penetrate, serve and evangelize the society in which she lives; and to come



to grips with it, almost to run after it, in its rapid and continuous change. This attitude, a response to the distances and divisions we have witnessed over recent centuries, in the last century and in our own especially, between the Church and secular society—this attitude has been strongly and unceasingly at work in the Council; so much so that some have been inclined to suspect that an easy-going and excessive responsiveness to the outside world, to passing events, cultural fashions, temporary needs, an alien way of thinking... may have swayed persons and acts of the ecumenical synod, at the expense of the fidelity that is due to tradition... the Church of the Council has been concerned, not just with herself and with her relationship of union with God, but with man—man as he really is today: living man, man all wrapped up in himself, man who makes himself not only the center of his every interest but dares to claim that he is the principle and explanation of all reality. Every perceptible element in man, every one of the countless guises in which he appears... man as the tragic actor of his own plays; man as the superman of yesterday and today, ever frail, unreal, selfish, and savage; man unhappy with himself as he laughs and cries; man the versatile actor ready to perform any part;” in other words, not man in the abstract, but concrete man as he appears before the eyes of the Church in history.

Paul VI continues, “Secular humanism, revealing itself in its horrible anti-clerical reality has, in a certain sense, defied the Council. The religion of the God who became man has met the religion (for such it is) of man who makes Himself God. And what happened? Was there a clash, a battle, a condemnation? There could have been, but there was none. The old story of the Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the Council. A feeling of boundless sympathy has permeated the whole of it. The attention of our Council has been absorbed by the discovery of human needs.... A wave of affection and admiration flowed from the Council over the modern world of humanity... the teaching authority of the Church [has descended] so to speak, into a dialogue with [the world], ... it has spoken with the accommodating friendly voice of pastoral charity... it has not merely concentrated on intellectual understanding but has also sought to express itself in simple, up-to-date, conversational style, derived from actual experience and a cordial approach which make it more vital, attractive and persuasive; it has spoken to modern man as he is. Another point we must

**For Fr. Giussani dialogue was not a debate. “Dialogue is to communicating your existence to another existence. You communicate your personal life to other personal lives through the signs of words, gestures and attitude.”**

stress is this: all this rich teaching is channeled in one direction, the service of mankind, of every condition, in every weakness and need. The Church has, so to say, declared herself the servant of humanity” (*Address during the last public session of the Second Vatican Council*, December 7, 1965).

Despite the passage of fifty years, we are still provoked by the Council’s invitation to have a sympathy and affection for concrete man, to enter into dialogue with anyone, knowing that in order to be persuasive, repeating doctrine is not enough, but that we need a lived experience. We should be the first to understand this, because Fr. Giussani began the Movement with this outlook, with this attempt at dialogue. We see it well in the formulation he gave to the phenomenon of the “radius.” “The radius is dialogue.” For Fr. Giussani dialogue was not a debate or a “discussion,” that sprang purely from “a taste for self-expression, curiosity, or pride in self-affirmation,” but “contact between experiences.” The radius, he continues, is “participating in the experience of whomever is speaking, and it means speaking your own experience.” Again, “Dialogue is communicating your existence to another existence. You communicate your personal life to other personal lives through the signs of words, gestures and attitude.” Not merely an exchange of ideas, but something realized in all aspects of life. “Dialogue,” continues Fr. Giussani, “is life. Our dialogue is very different from the secularist conception, which sees it as a debate, as a clash of more or less lucid ideas and mental measures. Our dialogue is a mutual communication of ourselves. In our dialogue, the emphasis is not on ideas, but on the person as such, on freedom.

Our dialogue is life, of which ideas are a part” (L. Giussani in M. Busani, *Gioventù Studentesca. Storia di un movimento cattolico dalla ricostruzione alla contestazione* [*Gioventù Studentesca. History of a Catholic Movement from Reconstruction to Protest*] Rome, Studium, forthcoming).

If dialogue is not debate, but communication of experience, then the issue is to look at what experience we have had in attempting to verify. No one can be convinced unless he verifies. It is not the argument, is not the dialectic, which makes us grasp the truth. We understand the truth only when it emerges in our experience. We have said it in so many ways, recalling the parable of the prodigal son. The father is unable to convince his son to stay home and had to give in to his son’s wish to have another experience, knowing that he might lose him for >>

» a time. Only through this—each of us can understand the journey—did it become clear to the son that the way he chose to satisfy his desire to be free was completely inadequate. His experiment was therefore subjected to the test of experience.

When questioned by Fr. Antonio Sicari on how to deal with the drama of a person who “despairs” into drugs, Giussani replies that you need to “help him recognize that the situation in which he has taken refuge is not only disproportionate but counterproductive to his desperate search for meaning, for happiness.” This means to help him recognize reality. But how to do this? “This requires a long, paradoxical patience. Paradoxical, because at the beginning it is as if you have to ‘permit’ the experience that he had.” How striking! It’s not that you do not want to convince him, but the question is how the real person, of whom the Council speaks, can be convinced. Either you tie him to a chair—you force him, which is obviously impossible—or, after telling him all you have to say, you are forced to “permit” the experience he intends to have. And what is Fr. Giussani’s reasoning? What is the ultimate reason for this course of action? He suggests we behave like that because it is “how God acts with man.” The real reason for this behavior is not a strategy that he invents, but it is that God has done this with man. From the very beginning, because He created us free, He could not avoid permitting man to behave as he wanted. Otherwise He would have killed us all at the first error. “God has had the patience to say to us,” continues Giussani, “Do as you will.” And what did man do? “He made the Tower of Babel” (“Intervista a Monsignor Luigi Giussani” [“Interview with Msgr. Luigi Giussani”], A. Sicari, ed., in *Communio. Strumento internazionale per un lavoro teologico*, no. 98-99, March-June 1988, pp. 195-196). Since that time we have done everything under the sun.

What about us? It is as if we wanted to spare man the exercise of freedom. But you cannot skip the risk of freedom, not because now it is unfashionable impose on people, but because God made us free. We are the first ones to want to respect God’s method.

The real challenge is how to offer something that is more attractive than what people may choose through reducing the scope of their desire. Faced with any proposal—even the most powerful, that of Jesus—freedom is always at stake, as the Gospel testifies. “For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon;’ the Son of Man

has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (*Lk 7:33-34*).

In this short Gospel text God’s entire method is revealed. Faced with a proposal, we too can choose to either follow or to interpret. This happens even when we give ourselves a suggestion for the path. Fr. Giussani said, in fact, about the charism, “There are two fundamental rules so that the charism can be lived with an obedience that makes the Movement capable of communicating the memory of Christ and of bearing witness to Him. First and foremost is unity, as a real, decisive reference to the original point. Without this real, decisive reference to the point where the charism originates, obedience is emptied out and the whole question leads to the great worldly and non-Christian principle of interpretation. There are only two paths: either obedience

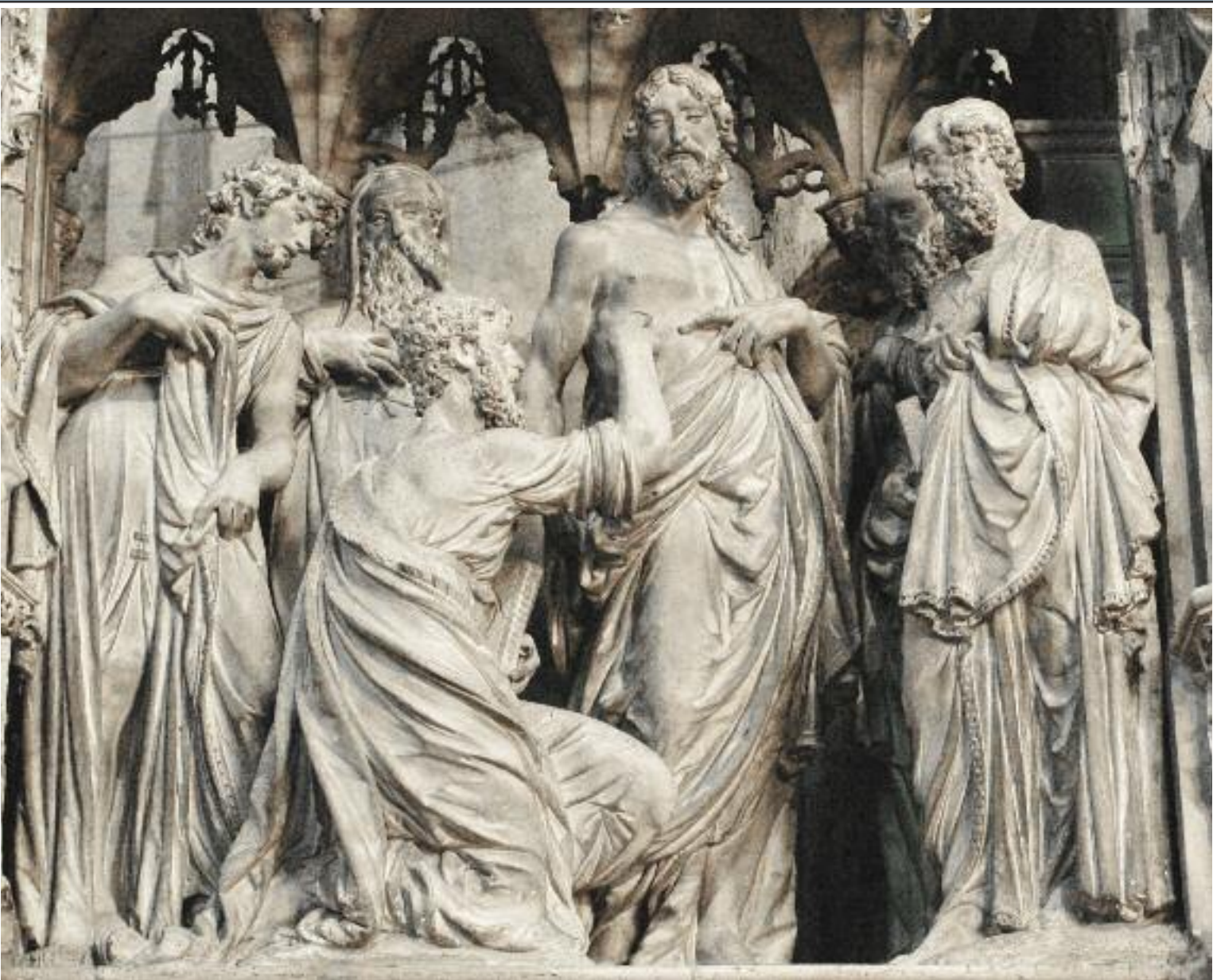
or interpretation. In obedience you affirm something that you encountered, something greater than you, from which you hope for your salvation, and for an ever greater truth and an ability to love for yourself. In interpretation you do nothing more than affirm yourself, your measure, namely, your limits and your defects. Obedience makes you flourish in front of a larger presence. Interpretation also tends to reduce the most generous and great presence, the most noble and rich presence, to our mental measure, to what we like. But then there is no longer a path; there is only argument, presumption and division. The second feature... is freedom. Freedom is personal responsibility, full of intelligence

and heart, in adhering to the fact that we were offered, in adhering to the great presence. Freedom is the ability to recognize a gift. It is the openness to the gift of recognizing and loving the great presence. It is the ability to abandon yourself in your very questionable measure” (*Occorre soffrire perché la verità non si cristallizzi in dottrina ma nasca dalla carne*, [It is Necessary to Suffer so that the Truth not be Crystallized in Doctrine but be Born of the Flesh], Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, manuscript, Rimini, 1989, pp. 48-49).

In our effort to follow the charism, it would be wise for all of us to bear in mind the clear recommendation of Cardinal Scola [Archbishop of Milan]. “There is a destructive temptation that should be avoided by all, one that often reoccurs in the history of the Church, in religious orders and different charisms. Within the nec-

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*The Disbelief of St. Thomas.*

essary, continuing identification with the experience and thought of the founder, we should not seek confirmation for our own well-considered interpretation, even in good faith, as the only adequate one. This position generates endless debates and paralyzing conflicts of interpretation” (*Homily at the Mass for the eleventh anniversary of the death of Servant of God Msgr. Luigi Giussani*, Milan Cathedral, February 16, 2016).

This means that each of us can belong in a non-formalistic way only if we are willing to verify what is proposed, because reality becomes clear in experience, not in our thoughts, nor in our debates. If we were willing to follow the method of experience, as always practiced by Fr. Giussani, this would spare us many useless discussions. It is useless to force people to do things without freely carrying out a verification, because we only grow by living.

Giussani understood the situation, and said that in a

society like this one “you cannot create something new if not from life. There is no structure, or organization, or initiative that can last. Only a different and new life [within the life of society] can revolutionize structures, initiatives, relationships, everything” (“Movimento, ‘regola’ di libertà” [“Movement, ‘Rule’ of Freedom,” O. Grassi, ed., *CL Litterae communionis*, op. cit., p. 44). We see it every time we tell each other about facts and encounters.

When he said these things he was well aware of the impact of power on society and he knew the starting point for a suitable attempt at an answer. So when Robi Ronza asks him, “Why is there no great cultural mobilization around ideas like those you have just expressed to me,” he said, “This may be the task of individual scholars and intellectuals, and not necessarily in place of a robust association like the Italian *Movimento Popolare* [“People’s Movement”—a political association linked to CL] has >>>

» become. Rather than mobilize people in great debates on how to bring about change, a reality like *Movimento Popolare* must actively help create the conditions that make change possible. When they come from an influential association in society, cultural mobilizations end up provoking alarm and causing reactions in the established order that are often much stronger than the awareness and the willingness to act that they produce outside of the established order. Therefore they end up being counterproductive to actual change.” (*Il movimento di Comunione e Liberazione. 1954-1986* [The Communion and Liberation Movement. 1954-1986], op. cit., pp. 218-219). This does not mean to retreat from living a culturally and operationally significant presence in the concrete environments where people live. No one more than Fr. Giussani insisted on this presence in the environment. And “the environment is where the world is open: school, work, the road” (*L’io rinasce in un incontro. 1986-1987* [The Self is Reborn in an Encounter. 1986-1987], op. cit., p. 85). So the point is not to retreat, but to create an original presence, evermore real and relevant. We need to help each other understand the contribution that is being asked of us at this historic moment and how we can bring it about.

**CIVIL LAW AND MORAL LAW**

One of the biggest obstacles to reaching clarity was the intertwining of civil and moral law in our debates about the law in question. Clarifying the relationship between the Church and the political sphere, at least on some salient points, can shed some light. In this regard, says Ratzinger, “Christ’s statement is still fundamental: ‘Give to God what is God’s and to Caesar what is Caesar’s’ (Mt 22:21). This statement introduced a breakthrough in the history of the relationship between politics and religion. Until then the general axiom that the politician himself was holy held sway [the politician and religion were one]... The above statement of Jesus severed this identification of State claims on people with the sacred demands of God’s will for the world. In this way the entire ancient idea of the State was called into question, and it is understandable that the ancient State saw in the denial of its totality an attack on the very foundations of its existence, an attack that it punished with death. If it were to assert the claim of Jesus, the Roman state truly had no chance of survival. At the same time, however, we must also say that this separation of State and sacred authority, the new dualism

contained in it, is the beginning and the persistent foundation of the Western idea of freedom. Since then there are two mutually ordered, but not identical, communities, neither of which is the totality.” Thus there can be space for freedom. “So each of these two communities is limited in its scope, and freedom is based on the balance of this reciprocal arrangement.... In the Middle Ages and in the early days of the modern age there was often a *de facto* merger of Church and State, a merger that deformed the need of the truth of the faith by constricting and caricaturing its authentic intent.... The dualism between Church and State... is the basic condition for freedom” (J. Ratzinger, *La vita di Dio per gli uomini. Scritti per Communio* [The God’s Life for Man. Writings for Communio], no. 208-210, July-December 2006, Jaca Book, Milan, 2006, pp. 212-213).

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Therefore, this dualism makes freedom possible. This then has repercussions in law. St. Augustine long ago stressed the difference between the civil law of the State and divine law. He wrote that it is perfectly understandable that “the law that is decreed to govern states seems to... permit much and to leave it unpunished, though it is punished by Divine Providence.... Because a [civil] law does not do everything, it does not follow that what it does do is to be blamed” (cf. St. Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, i,5,13). “In other words” writes Fr. Nello Cipriani, “civil law, although it must be inspired by the eternal law of God, does not necessarily coincide with it in everything, condemning and punishing anything that is contrary to the will of God” (N. Cipriani, “Il ruolo della Chiesa

nella società civile: la tradizione patristica,” [“The Role of the Church in Civil Society: The Patristic Tradition”], in *I cattolici e la società pluralista. Il caso delle “leggi imperfette”* [Catholics and Pluralistic Society. The Case of “Imperfect Laws”], J. Joblin, R. Tremblay, eds., Ed. Studio Domenicano, Bologna, 1996, p. 144).

Commenting on this same passage of Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas writes, “As Augustine says, human law cannot punish or forbid all evil deeds: since while aiming at doing away with all evils, it would do away with many good things, and would hinder the advance of the common good, which is necessary for human intercourse. In order, therefore, that no evil might remain unforbidden and unpunished, it was necessary for the Divine law to supervene, whereby all sins are forbidden (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 4). Civil law has a power of coercion that the moral





*Christ with the Two Disciples at Emmaus.*

law does not have. Therefore, in a society in which the principle of the two communities—the origin of the principle of freedom—is in force, you cannot think of imposing a law that has not come from method of civil society, which is first the forming of conviction in practical life and then, in democratic systems of government, parliamentary debate among the elected representatives of the people.

But this is true not only for today, as Cardinal Georges Cottier recalled. “Early Christian legislators... did not abrogate at once Roman laws that were tolerant of practices that did not conform [to the morality of the Church, because] the Church has always perceived as distant and dangerous the illusion of totally eliminating evil from history through law” (G. Cottier, “La politica, la morale e il peccato originale” [“Politics, Morality and Original Sin”], in M. Borghesi, *Critica della teologia politica*, [A Critique of Political Theology], Marietti 1820, Genoa, 2013, pp. 302-303).

So, writes Fr. Antonio Spadaro, in painstakingly avoiding “conflating the religious with the political,” Pope Francis “postulates the end of the age of Constantine, radically rejecting the idea of the implementation of God’s kingdom on earth” (“La diplomazia di Francesco. La misericordia come processo politico,” [“Francis’ Diplomacy. Mercy as Political Process”], *La civiltà cattolica*, I, 209-226 / February 13, 2016, pp. 215, 218). That time is past. Not even the laws produced by the French Revolution, which still preserved some Christian inspiration, have been able to last. In this situation there is still plenty of room for initiative. This is not to say we should do nothing. The problem is, what should we do in order to attract, convince, inspire with faith, to the point of challenge, people’s freedom.

And this also makes room for the work of politicians. From this standpoint, what Ratzinger said in 1981 is very interesting. “The state is not the whole of human existence [because of that separation that I mentioned >>>

» earlier] and does not encompass all human hope. Man and what he hopes for extend beyond the framework of the State and beyond the sphere of political action.... This unburdens the politician and at the same time opens up for him the path of reasonable politics [it lightens the load because not everything depends on a politician being able to propose a law to sustain everything, because politics does not have this aim].... Thus the first service to politics rendered by the Christian faith is that it liberates man from the irrationality of political myths, which are the real threat of our time. Taking a stand for sobriety, which does what is possible... is of course always difficult; the voice of reason is not as loud as the cry of unreason. The cry for the grandiose project has the cachet of morality; restricting oneself to what is possible, in contrast, seems to be the renunciation of moral passion, mere faint-hearted pragmatism [for many people this is relativism, a failure, a concession]. But, as a matter of fact, political morality consists primarily of resisting the seductive force of the big words for which humanity and its chances are being gambled away. The moral thing is not adventurous moralism, which tries to mind God's business, but rather, honesty, which accepts man's limits and does man's work within them. Not the uncompromising stance, but compromise is true morality in political matters" (*Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, op. cit., pp. 144-145).

In light of these words each of us can judge his own and others' reactions to what is happening. The attitude shown by Ratzinger toward politicians can perhaps seem weak, not sufficiently moral. So what you should do? We have also seen it when discussing the Cirinnà bill [Italian civil unions law]. Let us read what the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said in 2003. "In those situations where homosexual unions have been legally recognized or have been given the legal status and rights belonging to marriage, clear and emphatic opposition is a duty" (*Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, June 3, 2003, 5). That was 2003. And in 2007 everyone, without question, opposed both projects. Today recognition of the civil rights of same-sex unions is accepted, without equating it to man-woman marriage and removing stepchild adoption. Is this faint-hearted? Has the Church become relativist when she says that the removal of stepchild adoption from the bill on civil unions is "a correct hypothesis" (P. Parolin in P. Rodari, "La Chiesa teme 'altri

grimaldelli" ["The Church Fears the Slippery Slope"], *la Repubblica*, February 24, 2016, p. 8), and therefore an acceptable outcome, because it was what could realistically be achieved? This does not at all mean that the Church's morality has changed, as some believe. The problem is that to reaffirm the value of marriage, you cannot resort to the coercion of civil law. This is what the Church defended: the testimony of the beauty of the family.

A document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith points out, "As John Paul II has taught in his Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* regarding the situation in which it is not possible to overturn or completely repeal a law allowing abortion which is already in force or coming up for a vote, 'an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known, could licitly support proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening

its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality" (*Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, 2002, no. 4). Limit the harm! Is that relativism? *Evangelium Vitae* continues, "This does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects" (Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, 1995, no. 73).

I repeat what I said at the beginning: a circumstance such as this can help us understand what we are doing to the world. Surely we cannot prevent the spread of a mentality hostile to the values brought by

**We cannot prevent the spread of a mentality hostile to the values brought by Christ, but no one can prevent us from using the entire space of life in order to witness the beauty of Christian life.**

Christ or to the multiplication of laws that do not satisfy us. But no one can prevent us from using the entire space of life in order to witness the beauty of Christian life with all its wealth of implications, both cultural and operational, by putting in front of everyone an experience so fascinating that it can awaken the interest of the people we meet. This is the verification that we are called to make, both individually and as a community. And this is why Fr. Giussani insistently communicated Christianity as life to us, a life that is attractive for everyone. As Pope Francis says, "Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but 'by attraction'" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, no. 15). **†**