

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, January 30, 2013

Reference text: “Has Anyone Ever Promised Us Anything? Then Why Should We Expect Anything?” *CL University Students (CLU) Spiritual Exercises, booklet in Traces, no. 2, 2013* and online: http://us.clonline.org/default.asp?id=559&id_n=19975

Song *Marta, Marta*

Song *I wonder*

Glory Be

The work we had given ourselves for this evening was the introduction and lesson of the CLU Spiritual Exercises. As you know, the title was Pavese’s quote: “Has anyone ever promised us anything? Then why should we expect anything?” I want to start by reading an email I received that shows how this expectation, which is part of our makeup, is often reduced, and what makes us become aware of this reduction: “I am writing to tell you something that happened to me which shed light on the work you proposed on the text of the CLU Exercises. At Christmas I discovered that I was expecting my third child whom I desired so much in these years. As I was reading the exercises booklet, I was deeply struck by the topic you chose and by the students’ letters. It struck me also because it gave deeper meaning to the waiting I was living and I realized how true it is that we often live with expectation, but we are rarely aware of what we are truly waiting for. We wait for certain things to make us happy, for some people, for a child, while forgetting the One who alone can make us, and the people we love, happy. Therefore, I lived everyday thinking that within my waiting for this child there was an infinitely greater expectation. When a month later I had a miscarriage, I recognized how being aware of this constituent expectation puts everything back in place and lets you see reality to its core. The day I went to the hospital I was nevertheless grateful for having become a mother once again and I was sure that that tiny being had been made to live expecting the Infinite and had been able to meet Him so quickly.” I am amazed that a fact like this can help us, as she said, to see reality to its core. It is neither reasoning nor inferring, but a fact that happens and allows us to see reality to its core.

I am Chinese. I’ve been living in Milan for three months and in Italy for three years and three months. I got a college degree from the University of Bologna in Rimini. At the beginning, I barely knew the language and the local customs, so you can imagine how difficult each day was for me. The first year I thought I was a strong person and that I would be able to solve whatever came my way. However, when I made a mistake buying bleach (and I threw away all the clothes I had put in the washer) I changed my mind: one cannot live alone in this world. June 2011 was the hardest time for me, but everything changed thanks to a sign from God, a fortuitous and fantastic opportunity: I met many friends at the Rimini Meeting. From that moment on I developed vital friendships with people I feel very good with because I have a lot to learn from them and I never tire to learn. I finished college on time and graduated almost summa cum laude. Fifteen days after graduation I got a job in Milan. I wanted to stay in Rimini because I wanted to stay with my dear friends, but I didn’t find a job in Rimini. So, I started my new life

here. How happy I am to see Fr. Carrón face to face, until now I always watched him on the big screen...it is a pleasure to meet you!

The pleasure is mine!

In these days I sort of discovered the difference between studying and working. Let's say that while one is studying the goals have already been set: to pass the exam and graduate. With work it is different: the goal of work, like the goal of life, has to be decided. Especially those of us who are young, we need to know what we are going to do, how we will fulfill our thirst for life. However, it is easy to forget it when we repeat the same work every day. In China we tell the story of the frog. You put a frog in a pot and pour lukewarm water in it. At the beginning the frog feels comfortable and says, "I want to stay right here." You start to increase the water temperature gradually, so the frog doesn't think to jump out of the pot, until the water is scalding hot and the frog dies almost without noticing it. Therefore, we who are young have to commit ourselves seriously, using the right methods to prevent our desire for life from dying. In Milan I had good and bad days. Particularly in December, I was feeling really bad and I spoke about it with a friend who only asked me a quick question, "What is your hope now?" It was December, so at first I thought: the end of the world, since December 21st is so close. Then, I am very happy to say, on that day the world didn't end. So, I changed my answer: New Year's Eve is already here, we have to be industrious, so my goal is to earn a lot. Then, I thought that even when people are wealthy they are not happy, therefore money isn't enough. A friend told me (and I strongly agree with her), "We shouldn't look for who-knows-what hope; we only have to look at what happened to us." More and more He is our only hope: Jesus is the only one who cannot delude us and who can make us happy. There is a Chinese proverb that says, "If the journey is one hundred miles long, to walk ninety would be like going only half way." So, this journey is long, but we shouldn't tire of being on it. I am very proud to be here with all of you who are on this journey with me. I am very happy.

Thank you, my dear, and welcome! "What is your hope?" Whatever the way, whatever the origin, we are friends if we continue to ask this question that prevents us from reducing ourselves. At times it may happen through a friend, like for him, or through a circumstance.

At the beginning of the year I was sure of one thing: that at work things were going exactly as I wanted them to. On the other hand, at home it was difficult: I kept arguing with my wife, we both are a bit impetuous and hotheaded, nothing serious, but...A week ago there was a serious problem at work. We were all at a loss, all rather shocked by what had happened. Since I had to talk to the employees I asked myself what was supporting me in that moment to face this circumstance and to be able to face people, because everything seemed to be going downhill. So, before meeting with the others I told myself: I have a certainty, I am sure that I have a good destiny, that I am loved by Jesus and that He has a good plan for me. Therefore, within this circumstance that is not simple, that is difficult, with a sense of dizziness I became even more attached to this certainty. Moreover, the entreaty for Him to show Himself, and for the memory of this certainty to become more frequent became more urgent for me. Inevitably, my position started to change and I also started to recognize the answers, which came in ways I would have never imagined (a coworker, who usually comes to work at nine, said, "Tomorrow I will come at eight. I work at the computer, my job is very ordinary, but I am doing this seriously." Or, clients who say, "We have known you for years, we know who you are and so for us nothing has changed.") Therefore, within the difficulty, the perception of who I was started to become clearer and I started to have that "tender affection for myself" that was generated precisely by

being aware of what it is that I consist of. But, the biggest surprise, truly unimaginable for me, was that the relationship with my wife grew and became more alive. In fact, when I went home that evening this was really evident. I understand more and more that this awareness allows me to face a circumstance that is still difficult, problematic, but that reveals to me more and more the Other who gives meaning to myself and to the reality I am facing.

It is amazing how a fact like this – or the loss of a child, or being in a country so different from your own – can open us up. Because you thought that everything was fine, but the opening of this chasm allowed you to recover a relationship, to “see reality to its core” (as the first email said), to understand more clearly how an event can bring such an enormous possibility for change, within yourself and toward your wife. This is precisely the point: we don’t have to wait for who knows what, because reality is good and therefore it surprises us. He isn’t surprised by the fact that he has a different relationship with his wife because he went through some kind of mind-cleansing procedure. Very simply, an event opens wide reality again, opens wide the expectation again; opens wide all of our ‘I’ again and gives it back its true identity. Looking at this allows us to help each other to answer the questions we have, like that of this friend: “I am writing to ask for your help in making a further step in my experience. As I was working on the introduction of the Exercises, I was surprised by how much this ever present expectation, that is really indelible, dominates what I do. I find in myself the desire that what I am facing in every instant may not end in nothingness, may not pass without leaving a trace. I find in myself the not-to-be-taken-for-granted desire of breaking through and going beyond appearance. I recognize this in the way I face a patient, in the relationship with my wife, in the restlessness that the relationships with my coworkers and my friends often leave in me. The point is that in many circumstances I cannot stand this endless desire of my heart, this cry. I would prefer if it weren’t there, because most of the times it makes me sad since all this urgency doesn’t seem to find fulfillment in the present instant. I am struck by the fact that for you, instead, this expectation is not something to be filled, but is already relationship with the Mystery. This expectation is a source of gladness, because it is already the sign of Him. The expectation is full because it is already recognition of the Mystery. “I am the One you miss in everything you enjoy,” as you tell us. I understand that either the expectation becomes this recognition, or if it remains vague, only an emptiness to be filled, it becomes unbearable. What can convince us that the expectation is already filled by the Mystery?” This is what we often have a hard time recognizing. This is why I am going to read what another person wrote, after being struck by Pavese’s quote, which represents the entire content of the Exercises: “The first thing that surprised me was that the dynamics we are living now are analogous to what we lived when we worked on chapter 10 of *The Religious Sense*, focusing now on the nature of the religious sense. In the same way you once told me, “I grant you all the elements, but in this very moment you are not giving yourself life” [chapter 10, *The Religious Sense*], pointing to a fact to which I wasn’t paying attention. Now you tell us, “I grant you all the elements [the complicity, the suspicion that we are brainwashing ourselves, skepticism, the thought that nothing was promised to us and there is no fulfillment of the expectation...whatever each of you can think of], but you haven’t given yourselves the desire and the expectation you experience in this very moment.” They remain here, obstinately, we cannot eliminate them, showing another element that belongs to the structure of our nature: “Pavese’s genius is that in this phrase he identified a totally indelible factor present in the human experience: who among us can say that, no matter what he thinks, no matter the circumstance, he is not hoping?” With chapter 10 of *The Religious Sense* we had gotten to the point of saying: ok, I know that I am not giving myself life, I know that things exist,

but all of this is not moving me. Today, with chapter 5 of *The Religious Sense* [the chapter on expectation], we follow the same line of reasoning: yes, it is clear that I have the questions, that I have desire and expectation, but there's an abyss between the recognition of this fact and saying that the answer exists, that an object of this desire exists. In the same way, yesterday you were urging us to do the work of experiencing reality (the amazement for being: things exist, the fact of being exists, I am already in a relationship with a You), today you invite us to surprise in action the nature of our nature: I am expectation, I desire. I am amazed by how relevant Pavese's words are in describing the dominant mentality that paralyzes us: "What a great thought is that truly *nothing is due to us*," that nobody promised us anything. I find myself thinking of how shocking it is that the idea that by nature I am an autonomous 'I', not defined by a relationship, not structurally made for the other, has become the dominant way of thinking. Therefore, my restlessness, my desire, my expectation, are nothing other than a manufacturing flaw, a chemical problem of an incomplete evolution, to the point that the work of contemplating our desire, of keeping in mind the dynamics of our expectation seems to us downright forced, when instead this expectation is precisely what is most consonant with our 'I'. How deeply-rooted in us is the idea that nobody promised us anything. I realized that we need to explain Pavese's words, otherwise we don't understand them (and we think that they are saying something else): how beautiful to think that we already have everything, that nobody owes us anything, that we aren't missing any gift of grace, that everything is present in the expectation. Yesterday the challenge was to give in to Fr. Giussani's insistence: "We are not used to seeing as presence a leaf that is present, a flower that is present, a person that is present; we are not used to fixing as a presence the present things." Today the challenge is to face your provocation: what will win, the expectation or the denial of the expectation? Why is it a truer position to look at the expectation? And moreover, we need to surrender to the work of recognizing [this is the point] that the promise is already present in the expectation and in the desire. Expectation and desire are the place where the You is present [that is, the expectation is the strongest cry of this You, because without this You the expectation would not exist]. I am the nostalgia for a You who is promising me something. If at one point I understood that I am not starting from zero carrying my drama on my shoulders, because I do exist, because things exist, because here and now I am in relationship with the One who is making me, now I can recognize in my desire and in my expectation the ultimate religious point: my desire is desire for Him, my expectation is expectation of Him." Why is this? Because as the fact that I exist cries out that there is Another who is making me, likewise the fact that I live with expectation cries out that in the very structure of my 'I' there is Another who is calling me, who is promising me something. If we don't recognize this we eliminate the Mystery from the expectation and then we try to see how we can solve the problem on our own. The point is that the expectation is already the first sign of the Mystery, it is already the most powerful cry of the Mystery. This is why I always make the example of nostalgia, because nostalgia is the clearest sign that the other exists. In fact, without the other I wouldn't feel any nostalgia for him. Therefore, we need to start looking at expectation and desire beginning from what is easiest to understand, from what makes it easier for us. If we understand it it will be easier to embrace expectation, because expectation is already filled by the Mystery. It is like this, like it or not. You can recognize it or not, but this is how it is. This is the way it is, I don't have to sustain it with my energy, with my willpower, with my ability. No, no, this is the way it is! And this is what Pavese understood: why do we expect? We expect: this is the most stubborn factor there is, so much so that it belongs to the nature of the 'I'. Therefore, it is a problem of knowledge, that is, of this way of looking at the very core of the nature of this

expectation with all our awareness. Without this we grasp at straws looking for unlikely solutions, while it would suffice to recognize that the expectation is for Him and we would feel that our expectation is already fully embraced. So, He is right there. While we are looking for Him somewhere else, He is right there! And He doesn't leave just because we don't recognize Him. He is there in our expectation, within our expectation, filling it, raising it, re-awakening it: He is right there! Then one understands what a gift this expectation is: this structural expectation we are made of is the first step to recognize Him.

I felt that the recent proposal of the Movement had a profound unity. I was struck by its two aspects. On one side the insistence, that you are showing also now, on my nature as expectation. I was very struck by Rilke's poem: "Always distracted by expectation/ as though each moment announced a beloved's coming," because one is distracted...

These are the geniuses who help us enter into being: "As though each moment announced a beloved's coming." Why? This is the nostalgia for Him. The geniuses, as Giussani used to say, are like prophets, because they cry out to the whole world what is everybody's nature.

By the way, I was struck by that 'always distracted by expectation', because willing or not we are expecting.

This is it!

On the other side I was struck by reading at the same time the CLU Exercises and the movement's proposal on the Italian elections, presented by the Note of January 2nd. I felt that these two things were not disconnected, but instead they were both calling me back to the same position in front of reality; a position I discovered in myself, being surprised by a sense of humility instead of arrogance in front of reality. This position on the elections that was so new for me did not make me perceive this "not-knowing" as the opposite of certainty, but as a strength, because in this "not-knowing" I finally found myself with a need to listen, to understand, with a need to talk to everybody, to hear everybody's reasons. So, the great reason of my life became a curiosity of knowing everybody's reasons. This is a position of expectation in which I feel that what you reminded us at the CLU Exercises and what is written in the Note on the elections come together: this humility in front of reality. I felt I was given back the awareness of the historical importance of the movement, of the gestures we make. For example, as I was reading the Note I was struck by the historical value of the students' education, of my job as a teacher or of having School of Community with GS (high school students). My not-knowing full of curiosity and therefore humble in front of reality is however something that goes hand in hand with my being certain, certain of a Fact to which I belong and which is the only thing I have to say to the world. About the rest I want to learn from everybody.

Starting from what you said, I would like to propose five points as a path to delve into the current political situation.

- 1) *Our need.* We are called to vote. Do we already know for whom to vote? As we face the current situation it is easier to start from our personal need that is need for clarity: the need to understand the facts of the situation, which is absolutely not to be taken for granted. First of all, we need this humility, because this time, given the complexity of the situation, things don't add up right away. However, we live this need to know how to face the circumstance of the elections from the point of view of a person of faith, a Christian person who belongs to the Church. From this comes the second point.

2) *Faith and its verification.* How does the experience of faith I am living help me to face this need for more clarity? Each of us has a point of verification of how faith is relevant to the need for clarity regarding the elections: how he/she received and used the CL Note from January 2nd. Many people skipped over the first two points of the Note (in summary: the first point states that “The first level of political influence of a lively Christian community is its very existence.” The second point states that “the Christian community cannot but tend to have a personal viewpoint and method for facing the common problems, both practical and theoretical, which is offered as its specific collaboration to the rest of society”). They took them for granted, because what mattered to them was to quickly read through the lines and get to decide whom to vote for. This way of thinking is an example of what Fr. Giussani says (I quoted him in the Letter to the Fraternity I sent after the Synod), “For many of us, the fact that our salvation is Jesus Christ, and the fact that freedom for the life of man, here and in the after-life, is continually bound up with an encounter with Him, all this has become something of a merely ‘spiritual’ call to us. The concrete facts of life are considered to be something else altogether: the concrete facts of life would be something like a commitment to organized labor, having certain rights legally sanctioned; it would be a question of organization, [...] requiring many meetings. But all this would not be done as an expression of a need vital to our existence, but rather as a kind of inescapable mortification of our lives, as a weight and the price to pay for belonging, a belonging that we are still inexplicably desirous to pay for.” (*The Risk of Education*, SEI, Turin 1995, p.61). The fact that Jesus Christ is our salvation becomes a spiritual call and what we consider to be concrete would be something else altogether. Therefore, what is important is not all that comes before, but whom to vote for (as a banal interpretation of ‘concrete’). The rest would be a spiritual call: “Sure, the first and second point of the Note are fine, but what I am interested in is for somebody to tell me whom to vote for.” We don’t realize that in doing this we are emptying faith as the content of an experience!

What is actually hiding behind this position? The distrust that the experience of the movement may generate a subject able of critical judgment and responsible action, even in the realm of politics. It is the distrust that faith may generate a subject truly able of taking on a responsibility, able to make a judgment and take a stand on his own, even in politics. But this would be the failure of the Christian experience!

This is why I think that the circumstance we have to face is very useful. Even the elections are for our maturity, because the point in question is if faith lived as an experience is able to help us to face life, if it is relevant to life’s needs, as the Note says, that is, whether it is able to educate us even to give a political judgment. Otherwise we find outside experience the criteria for living life, including politics. In other words, the reasonableness of faith is at stake. The current elections are once again the opportunity to verify faith, in the sense of seeing in action what contribution a faith lived as true experience gives for facing life’s circumstances. One of you writes me that when she saw that facing this situation someone was already starting to call in ‘the expert’, she reacted saying, “Regardless the intention of the person who made the proposal of calling someone more knowledgeable, I can’t hide that as I listened to her I felt suffocated and I immediately thought: is it possible that we always need marching orders, somebody to tell us what to do? I started to ask myself: why not try to talk among ourselves about the

work we have started to do based on the judgment expressed in the Note? Why do we always have to find the reasons for our actions outside experience? Do we always need a guru who can finally convince us, or can we make it on our own?"

Does our experience allow us to do this or not? If the Christian experience is not able to generate a subject with a clear, mature awareness, born of experience itself, we have already lost, no matter who wins the elections! "Then I asked myself: so, when do I truly follow? There I suddenly felt all the weight of your heartfelt insistence on the matter of following, and how I reduce it. To look for confirmation outside our own experience is strictly connected to reducing following to just repeating someone else's discourse or to the organization, or to personalism, or to gestures." This brings me to point three.

- 3) *The Communion and Liberation Note*. It says precisely this, that when faith is not emptied of its meaning, for the very fact that it sets itself in reality, it inevitably has to do with everything, even politics. This is what we need to understand clearly. We see among us people able to face the death of their wife or son in a way that leaves us all speechless and then we say that we feel lost in front of politics! How is it possible? The movement can educate us to face death, but it is not able to educate us to deal with politics? We are not spared death, and if we try to evade the judgment on life, on death and on politics, if we spare ourselves the journey that leads us to it, we will never be able to be educated. This is why the Mystery doesn't spare us anything. Therefore, we are not friends if we spare each other the provocation that the circumstance of the elections addresses to each of us. On the contrary, we are friends if we help each other to take our need seriously and to say firsthand, "I live it like this. What do you think? Because I am interested in your judgment."

Starting from this commitment to the Note's content, we can find many suggestions that help us on, like the flyer of *Compagnia delle opere* (Companionship of Works), that contributes to clarify the situation, as well as what a politician may say, or some economic data may show. All of this will help us to continue to do the work that pertains to the Christian community as such (according to "its own viewpoint and method for facing the common problems"), which calls all of us to take a personal responsibility. Otherwise, we rely either on criteria and methods that originate elsewhere or on the guru of the time who tells us what to do. The consequence is that the more a subject is replaced by something else, the more it weakens and loses vitality. On the contrary, the less it is replaced, the more it grows into a true subject. As one of you was saying to me, "I got down to work like never before! It is urgent that I give a judgment: now it is clear to me and I desire it." Let's go to the fourth point.

- 4) *The question of unity and politics*. I would like to read you a passage from the book Truth and Tolerance by the then-Cardinal Ratzinger, that I think is crucial to help us understand: "In the political realm [...] the one single correct political option does not exist [this is secularism: a single political option, that is the only correct one, doesn't exist]. What is relative, the construction of a freely ordered common life for men, cannot be absolute [these are contingent attempts, questionable in their own nature, open to new developments, always revisable] – thinking that it could be was precisely the error of Marxism and of the political theologies. Even in the realm of politics, of course [be careful: this doesn't mean to embrace an absolute relativism, as if it were a 'free-for-all',

a “religious choice,” because it would mean the same thing], one cannot always manage with absolute relativism: there are things that are wrong and can never become right [...]; there are things that are right and can never become wrong. In the realm of politics and society, therefore, one cannot deny relativism a certain right. The problem is based on the fact that it sees itself as being unlimited. [instead of seeing it as not absolute.]” Now we can understand the crucial passage in the *Doctrinal Note on the Commitment of Catholics in Political Life*, written in 2002 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: “It is not the Church's task to formulate concrete solutions - and even less single solutions - to temporal questions that God has left to the free and responsible judgment of each person, even if it is its right and duty to pronounce moral judgments on temporal realities when required by faith or the moral law. If the Christian must “recognize the legitimate plurality and diversity of the temporal options,” he is equally called to dissent from a conception of pluralism in terms of moral relativism, harmful to the very life of democracy, which needs true and solid foundations, that is to say, ethical principles which by their nature and their role as the basis of social life are not "negotiable". In terms of concrete political militancy, it should be noted that the contingent nature of certain choices in the social field, the fact that often morally different strategies are possible to achieve or ensure the same basic substantive value, the opportunity to interpret in different ways some basic principles of political theory as well as the technical complexity of many of the political problems, explain the fact that generally there can be a plurality of parties among which Catholics can choose to be active to exercise - especially through parliamentary representation - their right and duty in the construction of the civic life in their own Country. This obvious observation should not be confused, however, with an ambiguous pluralism in the choice of moral principles or substantive values to which reference is made.” (II, 3)

This is the word of the Church that judges specific aspects of the political reality and its relationship with them. How could you impose on everybody your political choice in the name of faith? This is why asking the movement to ‘put itself out there’ telling people whom to vote for means to ignore everything we just recalled. Imagine if not having reached the certainly desirable unity in their political choice, Catholics were to ask the Pope or the President of a National Episcopal Conference to tell people whom they should vote for! It is obvious why the Church doesn’t do something like this, unless it is an emergency. If we want to safeguard our ecclesial identity at this level, we cannot forget this point and we have to help each other to understand how crucial it is. In the same way we don’t send ‘inspectors’ to check every work born out of a belonging to the Church.

So, does this mean that if we don’t ‘put ourselves out there’ with a directive on how to vote we are divided? I am going to answer with a letter I received from a university student: “I wanted to recount a very simple fact that happened in these days concerning how you challenged us to verify our faith starting from the Note of the movement on the political situation. Last Thursday, a student who has known us for a week came to School of Community for the first time. School of Community was all about comparing ourselves with the Note of the movement. It was a truly explosive hour: many questions, a very lively repartee between some friends eager to get into the details of the questions to discover something for themselves, not analytically, but verifying in experience the Note’s first basic point: “The first level of political influence of a lively Christian

community is its very existence.” We were asking ourselves: is it true that the Christian community, due to its very existence, proposes the presence that changes, that influences history? What is it that changes the heart, and therefore, what is it that changes the world? In spite of this strong provocation, as I was looking at the student who had come for the first time, in my moralistic way I was thinking: I wonder what he is thinking, perhaps he was expecting a spiritual hour, a comment on the Gospel, and instead he is listening for the entire time to people who, in order to grow, are looking at the circumstance of the political election. I thought: he will be scandalized and he will stop coming. What surprised me was that the following day they told me how this new friend reacted to the days he spent with us. He said, “ In any case, what amazes me is that I think of the Church as many rules to abide by, while in reading the Note and looking at all of you I realize that between you there is a companionship that is not afraid to challenge all your freedom. You are free and you engage your freedom personally to the core, down to the political vote.” I was very surprised by the fact that he noticed with simplicity, better than I did, that the unity of our experience is something that comes before any action we take, before any mark on the ballot; that true unity is possible if there is one who unites us, one who is not afraid to challenge me, one who actually wants to challenge me because he cares for my growth more than for political unity. This unity is a presence, so much so that it allows one who doesn’t know us and has different ideas from us to recognize that it is worth to stay in this companionship, that here there is that promise you were talking about after the Synod. He asked to come to School of Community on Wednesday evening. I thank you, because this quite confusing circumstance of the elections, that I often thought of as a situation to be endured plugging your nose, is becoming an opportunity to be educated. In this education my freedom is loved down to the last implication, the vote, and the true topic is my Christian experience, it is my faith; not faith as an alibi to shy away from concrete things, but the Christian encounter as the most concrete thing to enter reality in a free way, full of hunger and desire. In the morning I get up and I ask myself: what am I really expecting today? What am I looking for? I am waiting for the gaze of Christ who has all my humanity at heart. Only this makes me free.”

- 5) *The purpose of education.* “The purpose of education is to fashion a new human being; for this reason, the active factors of the educational process must guide the pupil to act with increasing independence and to face the world around him on his own. To do this, we must increasingly expose him to all the elements of his environment, while also gradually allowing him more responsibility for his choices.” (L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, NY 2001, pp. 80-81). Let’s not do the opposite! Let’s not take away the risk of having to make a choice, as if we had already solved the question by ourselves! Politics has already been emptied of any possibility of participating; what is left is just the possibility to vote, but if they spare us even this decision (or if we want to spare it to others), what kind of education are we giving? Instead of filling point one of the Note with content, from which to draw all the clarity for point two, we would actually empty the educative content of both point one and two, skipping to point three. If this were the purpose of the movement I wouldn’t be interested.

This is why I think that the current elections are a great opportunity, during this Year of Faith, to understand the very nature of faith. As I already said in the interview with the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* a year ago, we care for an experience of faith that involves everything, up to politics, precisely due to the nature of faith. However, this statement doesn't mean to 'skip' that relativism mentioned by Ratzinger which is part of the very nature of politics. Helping each other to understand this is an important step, because here the very nature of the Christian experience is at stake.

Listen to what Blessed John Paul II tells us in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*: "There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called "spiritual" life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called "secular" life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the "places in time" where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility - as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture - are the occasions ordained by Providence for a 'continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity' " (Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 59, December 30, 1988).

This is why in every discussion, starting from our need for clarity helps us to challenge each other to a non-rationalistic use of reason, by asking questions, giving reasons for our choice, to see if it can stand in the face of the objections of someone else who – like me – is looking for the common good. Perhaps, then we will discover that what we thought we understood is not so clear, that maybe we didn't understand, that we need to restart from point one, two, three in the Note. We need to fill them with the flesh of our reasons and of our experience. If we meet people who haven't made this journey because they think that everything is already taken care of, we shouldn't repeat the lesson to them. No. We need to address what this and that person is saying challenging their position with reasons, with facts, to help each other clarify things together. However, if we don't make the journey firsthand, if we don't take the questions seriously (for example: "But, are we really sure that we know how things are?" "Did we keep this and that factor in mind?"), then we are not helping each other. It's not acceptable that the first person I meet in the street, whoever he is, can tell me that everything is clear without any explanation. In this matter the only element of authority are the reasons you are giving. Similarly, we can say that in this field there is no 'revealed right' (not even for the greatest expert), not even for the Church.

Listen to what Benedict XVI said in the famous speech to the Bundestag: "Everyone in a position of responsibility must personally seek out the criteria to be followed." Why does he need to do it? Because, "Unlike other great religions, Christianity has never [never!] proposed a revealed law to the State and to society, that is to say a juridical order derived from revelation. Instead, it has pointed to nature and reason as the true sources of law [...] acknowledging reason and nature in their interrelation as the universally valid source of law [which I think in the end is the key to everything]." (Benedict XVI, Address to the Bundestag, Reichstag Building, Berlin, September 22, 2011). He acknowledged

experience as the source of knowledge (this is why Fr. Giussani always insisted that “reality becomes transparent” in experience). If the source of our decision doesn’t come from the very experience we have in the Christian community, in actuality we are recognizing that faith is not capable of generating a subject who can reach clarity on these issues, and we will inevitably rely on some other source outside faith for our judgment.

Here we go back to the origin of the movement. Because this is what Fr. Giussani did: “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.” (*The Risk of Education*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 2001, p. 11). What was the method? It was experience: to compare everything with the needs of the heart. If we don’t arrive to this, I couldn’t care less about political alignments, because it would mean that in the end we draw the criteria for our electoral choice from outside the very experience we are having. This is what is at stake today. If the experience of faith helps us to reach a judgment, even temporary, also in politics, this judgment, full of reasons, may become the starting point of a discussion with the others. Only in this communication of our reasons we maintain that tension “in the search for unity” also in politics, according to the witness of faith Fr. Giussani always talked to us about.

However, this is our educational problem, it is the problem of the movement, because for us the current elections are an opportunity to say what faith is and that the contribution of faith also has a political and civic value. Otherwise, we end up considering faith as a spiritual call, an insider thing – “for us” - , but then in the political arena we need to use other criteria. This is our main cultural contribution in this situation: the position of an ecclesial subject. The example Fr. Giussani proposes regarding point one in the Note is very significant: “The multiplication and growth of lively and authentic Christian communities can only give life and see the development of a movement that tends to have an increasing influence on society [...]. If you allow me compare small things to great things, I would like to remind you of the example of the Benedictine movement. [...] This movement arrived to influence “the code of civic life of its time” thanks to the multiplication, by hundreds and thousands, of its communities of prayer and work, around which civic life coalesced and regained substance.” (L. Giussani, *The Movement of Communion and Liberation*, Jaka Book, Milan 1987, p. 119). So much for a religious choice! On the contrary, the more Christianity is emptied of its historical importance, which means the more faith is lived in a reduced way and its ability to invest the totality of the subject is rejected, the more our expectations for change and for having an impact rely on ‘politics’ (in the strict sense of the word). As a friend always used to say to me, nobody remembers who was king at the time of Saint Benedict, but everybody remembers Saint Benedict. This is the historical influence of the Christian community.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday February 27 at 9:30 pm. We will work on the Assembly and Synthesis of the CLU Exercises.

The book of the month for February will still be Pope Benedict’s The Infancy Narratives. We propose it for another month suggesting to everybody to read it or to finish reading it.

The Fraternity Spiritual Exercises in Italy will be April 19-21. Registration is only online from February 11 to March 18.

The **Banco Farmaceutico** (Free-Medicines Bank) will organize the XIII National Day of Medicines Collection on February 9 in Italy, Spain and Portugal. It is an important gesture of gratuitousness and solidarity that helps the poorest among us, especially at this time of recession.

The Bank is looking for volunteers to help collect the medicines from the drugstores.

For information: www.bancofarmaceutico.org

Veni Sancte Spiritus