

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, February 27, 2013**

Reference text: “Did anyone ever promise us anything? Then why do we await something?” *CLU University Students (CLU) Spiritual Exercises, booklet in Traces, no. 2, 2013 and online:* http://us.clonline.org/default.asp?id=559&id_n=19975, pp. 32-62.

Song *Ballad of the Old Man*

Song *Quando uno ha il cuore buono*

Glory Be

The work we had assigned for this evening was the second part of the CLU Spiritual Exercises. That wasn't last month's only defining event, though. We had also given ourselves some suggestions to live the elections time, and then an unforeseen event happened: the Pope's resignation. Both are facts that, in their own way, provoke our person and our life. Let's see what journey each person has made or is making after all that has happened; what each of us has discovered and how what we are living is making us grow and mature.

The news of the Pope's resignation reached me while I was in Venezuela ready to come back home. I was deeply struck by what you wrote in La Repubblica: you said that for an instant the whole world was stunned, stood in silence. Shortly after, I had to catch my flight and at the airport the police questioned me, with very imposing authority, asking me to open my suitcase three times, asking me the reason for my visit and the length of my stay. Then, at one point they looked at me and asked, "Is it true that the Pope resigned?" And then, "How can a person become Pope?" This was coming from people who didn't even know the Pope's name! So, it is true: it really happened to everybody. However, after reading your letter I realized that only one person had been aware of being amazed. We were all amazed and we all know what we were doing in the instant in which we heard the news, but being aware of being amazed was something new. When you wrote this and helped us to realize that we were amazed, you gave us the criterion to face the whole world that was looking for explanations, ourselves included. In acknowledging our experience we became able to make a judgment. If I don't recognize this experience I am having, this repercussion I felt, I don't have the criterion to judge and, like everybody else, I start from my opinion: I love the Pope and so the explanation is going to be that...and so on. But I have already skipped the first step and the criterion becomes an opinion instead of an irreducible experience, so much so that if some views don't explain the experience I had, I don't accept them as an explanation. In fact, following your description of all the steps you took, you introduced the hypothesis that only his relationship with Christ can make the Pope so free. You added, "I was then forced to shift my gaze to what made it possible: Who are You, who fascinate a man to the point of making him so free?" This word 'forced' struck me, because it is precisely the description of reason that accepts the journey to get from the sign – what happened to me as experience - to the only explanation, to the meaning, in other words, to say "You" to Christ. Who are You Who make this possible?

You are saying that if we don't become aware of the first repercussion...

It immediately becomes ideology in the sense that we don't have the criterion to challenge the world, and therefore we don't have an explanation to offer, because we are part of that world that only expresses an opinion.

We will go back to this, but I think you understood the essential point of a human journey, because everybody is amazed at the beauty of the mountains, but not everybody follows the path in order to arrive at the “I am You who make me” of chapter 10 of *The Religious Sense* (to give an example we are familiar with). Therefore, if we don't recognize what is within the repercussion we miss the best of what is happening, and many reactions we have, or the dismay, the confusion, and the discouragement we feel – each of us can think of the feeling he had – are the consequence of not having grasped what is really present in reality. Then, we are at the mercy of opinions like everybody else, because there are no facts anymore, but only interpretations. Also, much of the dismay so evident during the elections has the same origin. We don't react to the elections in one way and to the Pope in another: we experience the same repercussion, and often the same difficulty. We reduce the Pope's gesture in the same way we reduce what can give us clarity in front of the elections. I hope each of us made the journey and was aware of it. This is why it is interesting how the difficulty in understanding the issue of expectation (CLU Exercises) often makes us unable to see reality in its truth, because often we are not able to let ourselves be struck by what exists. I am going to read some of the letters you sent me. “I read that ‘The community is the place of the continuity of the event of Christ, and if you rip yourself away from these apparent chance relationships, you don't lose those relationships, but what struck you in those relationships.’ It is true. I could do without everything in life, except the fact that Christ is with me, the fact of knowing that He wants me now. Through time I experienced that it is impossible to be content with a beautiful way of staying with people, only to wake up in the morning disappointed because Jesus' companionship is the only one that can reach to the core of my longing. However, I often look around and I have a hard time recognizing in someone else the same nostalgia I have. Until not long ago, I used to handle it by doing things, but now I can't anymore and I don't even want to, because I recognized and recognize in my experience that His great love for me is what saves me. At times, though, I feel that several people around me are looking at this with skepticism. That is, it is ok to have the desire, but in the end we are sure that we are good, enthusiastic and active members of CL who have all the answers, to the point of sometimes judging negatively those who may be taking a longer and more complicated journey. I have this strong feeling, I am almost brought to think that maybe with my sense of longing that makes me implore I haven't understood something [we think we are the ones making a mistake when we experience this]. It is as if I run the risk of having an individualistic attitude. And yet, honestly, I never felt having such a loving relationship with reality as I feel now. When I read or listen to what you are saying, describing my soul in such detail, I recognize once again that I am that cry and I don't want something that simply heals the wound.” If we don't start from this need, as we said also with regards to the elections, if we don't start from this expectation, from this open question, we cannot grasp the importance of the answer and we are not interested in getting involved in reality in order to find it. So, what happens? Belonging to the Church and the Movement becomes something we live on the side, as another letter says, “The restlessness, the desire, are often a painful experience. The desire for meaning is the throbbing background of everyday life that I try to silence because for me it is something desperate. This is why I don't understand how you can say: the fact that I am waiting cries out that there is Another Who is calling me, Who is promising me something in the very structure of my ‘I’ [this is the difficulty: to grasp the weight of the facts that happen, to

grasp that in order to explain the Pope's gesture we need to recognize Christ's contemporaneous presence, to grasp that to recognize the expectation we need to recognize the One Who is continuously awakening it]. The belonging to the Movement remains a fact juxtaposed to this expectation that also gives me the true perspective of all my loneliness. Forgive me for being so blunt, but your position is so loyal in front of reality that I cannot be any different. Often I think that due to my situation (that I just described to you) I would be more honest if I left the Movement [this is why many people leave the Church]. I would like also to clarify that I don't have true reasons for being desperate; on the contrary I have many reasons to be happy: I have a husband, children I love, a job and the respect of many colleagues. Yet, I have a dull pain within, a desire that by nature cannot be fulfilled, and I don't understand why it continues to gnaw at me, why an act of faith cannot assuage it. What is the point of having faith in God if the desire for something infinite continues to torment us? As you said at the last assembly, "If we are not aware of this we empty the expectation for the Mystery and then we try and see how we can solve the problem on our own;" so belonging to the Movement can be a choice made to solve the problem by ourselves, silencing the question. This is a violent choice that crushes my humanity. I will be grateful if you answer me." If we silence this expectation and are not aware that it is the clearest sign of Him (as we explained at length throughout the CLU Exercises), we 'crush' our humanity. Why is it difficult for us to recognize the presence of the Other, the presence of the Mystery in the nostalgia, in the expectation, in this restlessness? Why? Because we don't understand what a 'brain-dead' life would be like, that is, a life without desire, a life in which I feel 'dead' in front of reality. I understand that one may want to run away from this, and this is why then it is difficult to understand when we say that Christ has not come to flatten man's desire, but to awaken it. However, is the fact that He reawakens it and gives us an ever growing desire for Him a calamity or something good? To be able to answer we have to look at ourselves and see what happens in our life, otherwise we think that this can be solved through our strength, projects, or attempts. Instead, as we saw in the past few days through the great witness of the Pope, there are facts that by their very presence belie any attempt of seeing faith as something ultimately useless to solve life's problems. On the contrary, what happens when we see someone like Benedict XVI who witnesses to us the answer, as many of you saw today in Rome? We have in front of us a presence in which we can touch first-hand what Christ is, what faith makes possible. He gave us the unexpected (for us mysterious) gift of this gesture full of witness to Christ, and made the gesture of faith, that is, the recognition of Christ present, possible also for us. Only in front of such a presence can one face all his uneasiness, his difficulty in truly embracing himself. Without the contemporaneous presence of Christ we cannot truly love ourselves: this is why we need this contemporaneous presence. At the same time, without the cry of our expectation we could reduce Christ to a juxtaposed fact, with no effect on our life.

Recently a fact happened which basically took over my life with respect to all the things that are happening at this time. Let's say it was a stroke of luck, if you allow me this word, because it caught all my attention. I now work in a place different from before where there is no community of the Movement. About a month ago, as I was talking with a person – the kind of conversation you can have with anybody – about a certain pervasive restlessness he had, I answered by giving him the booklet of the CLU Exercises: "You are restless for the reason described in this booklet." We saw each other the next day and he told me, "I devoured what was written," and added something that deeply moved me, "I had never heard words like those." From that moment a deep friendship was born with this person and a web of lively relationships started and

developed: a community is flourishing in a place where until a month ago I was alone. I was amazed because I was totally taken by this fact that I call 'encounter'; it is as if everything else were less important. What did I tell myself? First, how powerful my small freedom is, because that evening it seemed like the umpteenth conversation that you can face with a certain preconception (sure, what could come out of this?!). Instead I discovered that I can see once again the light I saw the first time, the second time, and the umpteenth time. This fact that has taken over makes me perceive as an experience that Christ is really a presence, that He is the one who takes care of things in the world, that He is the protagonist, and that my Christianity (so to speak) is His gift, a gift from Him to me. For me it meant to verify not through a thought, but through a concrete event made of my and their small freedom, how in this broken world a civilization is reborn. What is needed is only my 'yes'; this yes, though, is not a mental yes, but a very simple yes in front of someone's restlessness. I told him, "You know, your restlessness is also my restlessness." I am moved by this thing that allows me to say that He will take care of whatever happens.

Why do you think it captivated him so much that he devoured that text?

Because, obviously, things are like they are described there.

For the reason you mentioned, that is, because of an expectation that found an answer. I am struck by this, also thinking about the previous letter: in front of the same fact one finds something totally new to the point of regenerating his whole life, of engulfing it and starting something new, even generating a community in a place where you would have not imagined it. And you don't have any other explanation to offer about this – because you don't think that you are the one generating this – than the powerful presence of Christ. And in the middle of a broken world, this is the beginning of a civilization: it is really true. After what we saw with the elections, to be able to understand what our contribution may be, we have to restart from there, recognizing that the first point of the CL Note is not so farfetched, but is instead the point of hope: that the Christian community exist and restart, according to a design that is not ours, starting from the small 'yes' of each person, from the small motion of each person's freedom, to regenerate a civilization. The fact that people vote with their 'belly' is indicative of how broken this civilization is. Is it clear?

Yes.

I thank you, because we shouldn't separate things: this on one side, the elections on the other, and the Pope on another. What unites all this? A person writes to me, "I understood better the change that working on the CL Note has brought, not just on the elections as such, but on the rest, during my solitary trip to Iran, where I go often for work. The sentence of the Note that, 'The first level of political effect of a lively Christian community is its very existence' is something I have always lived as if somehow I had to defend or promote the existence of something. When I am (for the umpteenth time) in Teheran for a week, there isn't much to think about defending or promoting; you are alone, you cannot express or defend something, nor is there a companionship in which you can tentatively take shelter. I always lived this as some kind of defeat, maybe waiting to say my Catholic line in some discussion (because in the English-speaking world they don't dislike religious topics), but in the end almost like staking my little flag among the other one hundred flags. In fact, sometimes you manage to say what you think, but most of the times you just wait to get back home to resume living. What surprised me this time was the initial, but clear realization that the live Christian community consists of me, aware of this fact, alone in the middle of Iran [that is, the protagonist is an 'I' that has this awareness]. There is no alternative to this, because life and desire cannot be suspended during a trip. This is a

provocation, because it is clear that Jesus arrived in Teheran with me (such a nonentity and lacking in so many ways) as I got off the plane. Afterwards I could or could have not said something, but the objective fact was that the ‘effect’ was embodied by me, aware of being the Christian community. The beginning was cold and formal as always. Iran is a country where skeptical secularism dominates, but then the fact of the Pope’s resignation and the curiosity that this aroused in the people with whom I was speaking was a grace that allowed me to express my esteem for that man, explaining why an engineer from the West, skilled in his profession and in full possession of his mental faculties, reason and analytical skills, is seriously and reasonably a Catholic. This was ‘something more’ because it could have not happened, but since it happened I went with it. In short, I started to understand that the entire question, also political and social, is played out in the awareness of my ‘I’. If I am not present, there is nothing else, not even the best and most just battles on values and on the Church, to preserve the one sixth of the world where it is normal to eat three times a day and where to be a Christian doesn’t put one’s life at risk. If I am not present, even the most just and committed battle doesn’t bring or build anything.” If then the Mystery lets a community be generated by this ‘I’ it is even better! But this doesn’t depend on us, it will depend on how He will use our small gesture of freedom that is called ‘faith’ to generate something else. It is crucial that we understand this at the end of this election period.

Some excerpts by Father Giussani help us to understand the situation we find ourselves in, which the result of the elections highlights even more. During this time we gave ourselves a work to do, which was quite simply to take seriously our need for clarification, starting from the most relevant element we have, that is, the Christian community. We were asked to see how relevant faith is to the needs of life, because if we don’t recognize this we end up asking ourselves what the use of faith is. Where can we see this? In the way each of us lived this time. Now we are at the end and each of us can see what journey he or she has made. This evening it became clear, at least as a starting point, that everything is played out in the first repercussion in front of reality, be it the elections, the Pope, the person you have in front of you, your work, your expectation, that is, in front of life. If each of us doesn’t take reality seriously and if this doesn’t become the starting point, we are already ‘modern’; in truth, we are already giving in to ideology. In explaining the origin of the situation we are living today, Fr. Giussani says that our attitude as modern men in front of reality is lacking true problems. He describes it in *Why the Church?* “Life is a web of events and encounters which provoke the conscience, producing all different kinds of problems [they raise problems: the elections, life, the Pope, what happens]. But a problem is nothing other than the dynamic expression of a reaction in the face of these encounters [in the face of what happens]. Life, then, is a series of problems, its fabric made up of reactions to encounters that are provocative to a greater or lesser degree. Discovering the meaning of life - or of the most pertinent and important things in life [which he will later define as culture, love, politics and work] - is a goal which is possible only for the individual who is involved with life seriously, with its events, encounters, and problems [we cannot solve this just by talking about it; it is revealed only to those who are committed to live life seriously!]. When a problem arises [the first step, the beginning of this], then, it implies [that in front of reality I recognize] that an interest has been sparked. Intellectual curiosity is thus aroused” which sets off the dynamism of my ‘I’ to look for a meaning (whom to vote for, how to face life, how to answer to my expectation). Without this the object we want to know remains foreign and we become confused. What happens then? If this interest doesn’t arise in us, to the point of moving my entire ‘I’, we start losing pieces along the way. Fr. Giussani calls it the beginning of a process of disarticulation of the ‘I’ and of society: “The origin of this weakening of an organic mentality

[...] finds its source [I wish I could stop here and challenge everybody to say where it finds its source...] in an option permanently open to the human soul. It occurs when there is a sad lack of committed interest and an absence of curiosity towards all reality.” If an interest that moves our entire ‘I’ is not stirred when we acknowledge the problem, what it means to live remains beyond our grasp and we fall apart as it often happens. What helps this to begin? What helps this to happen? What is the role of the Christian community in this? How does it help us? It could do what many people do with their children, taking their place. Instead, look at what Fr. Giussani says, “If the Church were to proclaim that its aim was to take over the human effort of self-advancement, self-expression, and human searching [that is, if it took away this journey we proposed for ourselves], it would be acting like the kind of parents [...] who are deluded into thinking that they can resolve their children's problems by taking their place.” When we ask the movement to solve for us the challenges we have to live (for example, suggesting whom to vote for), we are deluded into thinking that we can solve the problem by letting somebody else take our place. But the purpose of the Church is this: “The Church's direct task, then, is not to provide man with solutions to the problems he encounters on his way [if you are looking for prepackaged solutions go somewhere else!]. [...] Its proclaimed function in history [paradoxically it looks inconsequential] is to educate us to the religious sense [that is, to reawaken the expectation, to reawaken the awareness of the need we have, which is the starting point of those 5 aspects we discussed at the last School of Community, because this implies] the appeal for man to adopt the right attitude in front of reality. [To recall us to this, to educate us to this is the greatest contribution the Church can give, because it puts the person, each of us, in the] best condition that man can have for finding more adequate answers to those questions [that life asks us. Because,] the spectrum of human problems could never be removed from the realm of man's freedom and creativity. It is not the Church's task to provide him with a prepackaged [then and there!] solution, and, if it were to do that, it would fall short of its own foremost educational attitude. It would devalue time.” Fr. Giussani gives an example we all remember, because our temptation was also the temptation in Jesus’ time. It is the example of the two brothers who ask Jesus to solve their argument about their inheritance. “‘Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance.’ He said to him, ‘My friend, who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?’ [Jesus doesn’t accept the role they want to give him]. Then he said to them, ‘Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist in possessions, even when someone has more than he needs’” Fr. Giussani comments, “It cannot have been unusual for people to look to Jesus to resolve quarrels and controversies, as they often did with people acknowledged to be masters. How instinctive [we know it so well] it is in man to think he has found the source of solutions to his problems! [How true today!] However, Jesus immediately clears the air of this misunderstanding; He who showed himself to be the authoritative judge [...] makes a decisive declaration in this case: it is not up to Him to arbitrate on the matter. Undoubtedly he must have disconcerted his interlocutor [as many were among us for not receiving any indication on whom to vote for]. However, Jesus does not neglect to fulfill what He is there to do.” And what is He there to do? Do you think that if He had answered them they would have stopped arguing? They would have started again! It is enough to read the rabbinic literature: it isn’t that God had not spoken, but the rabbis started discussing with each other about the interpretation, until they turned the very word of God into one of the available opinions among conflicting interpretations. What does Jesus say? “Christ, like the Church - which is the continuation of Him - did not come to resolve problems of justice [in this case]. No, He came to place in man's heart the condition without which the justice of this world could have

the same root as injustice.” In fact, many times if we don’t get a prepackaged solution, we think it is too little. It looks as if Fr. Giussani can read our minds, and in the following line he says, “It is not that Christ and the Church have no function at all as far as men's problems are concerned. [...] This is not a magic formula for the mechanical avoidance of such crimes, yet it is the [only] basis for which the solution may more easily be more human.” That is: only if the Church – in continuity with Christ – witnesses to us, recalls us to and reawakens in us the religious sense, it puts us in the optimal condition to face the question of what it means to live, to face the problems of life. We often think that Christ didn’t come to awaken this religious sense, this sense of the Mystery, this awareness of our need, but to reduce it with a prepackaged solution. But this wouldn’t be Christ and in time He wouldn’t interest us anymore. Because, we can each verify right now, at the end of this path, what journey we have made: whether we committed our whole self after the first repercussion in front of the elections. We can see what happened in those who committed themselves and what happened in those who did not commit themselves. We can judge to what degree the journey we have made has affected our own person and our communities, because the witness we just heard is a sign of how a small freedom that moves has the power to generate. I think that if we are not the first to start to follow this path, that is, if the Christian community is not able to generate this kind of subjects, we can end up like ‘that third of the Italian electorate.’ We will not be very different if we think we can spare ourselves this work. If from the very beginning we told ourselves to use these weeks to verify how faith is relevant to life’s needs, now at the end of the path we can tell ourselves what happened (as a personal work or as the work of the various communities). Only if we accept to move from the initial repercussion to the commitment that this implies – with the help of the Church that continues to put us in the optimal condition to face reality – can we generate a subject who lives up to the circumstances and challenges we find ourselves to face.

Next School of Community will be on March 20 at 9:30 pm.

After finishing the work on the CLU Exercises we will resume with the text *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, chapter 7: “The explicit declaration.”

I remind you the email address you can use to send questions and short witnesses on the section of School of Community discussed at the time. I ask you to use it only and exclusively for School of Community. The address is: sdccarron@comunioneliberazione.org

The **Easter Poster** is available. The image is a bas-relief of a Romanic cloister, with Christ and the pilgrims of Emmaus. The two texts are from the Pope and from Fr. Giussani. Since it is the *Year of Faith* we wanted to put in front of us what faith is.

Benedict VXI says, “The life of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be confined to a distant past but is crucial to our faith today. What does it mean to say that Jesus of Nazareth, who lived between Galilee and Judaea 2,000 years ago, is a ‘contemporary’ of every man and woman alive today, and in every epoch? Jesus entered human history for ever and lives on in it with His beauty and power, in that frail body—ever in need of purification but also infinitely full of divine love—which is the Church, in which He is present with His passion, death and Resurrection. It is this that makes the Church contemporaneous with every human being, capable of embracing all people and all epochs.” Pope Benedict not only communicates to us the content of faith, but he witnessed it to us in a great way in the last weeks up to today, as many of you have seen. His gesture and all we see in his person is nothing other than the evidence that these are not just

words and that only the contemporaneousness of Christ makes it possible that there be a man like this. Whatever may be the difficulty one may face in certain moments, nobody can erase from history what we have seen in these days. This means that Benedict XVI can retire because he gave us the best he could give us: making Christ present not only in the last breath of life, but when he still has all the lucid awareness of what Christ means, not as a fact of the past, but as a contemporaneous presence. He didn't do this by adding words, but because without the contemporaneous presence of Christ we couldn't have seen what we saw and are seeing in him. Fr. Giussani's text is this: "The fact of the incarnation, this inconceivable Christian claim, has remained in history in its substance and entirety: a man who is God—who thus knows man—and whom man must follow if he is to have true knowledge of himself and all things. This initial experience has an unequivocal meaning: destiny has not left man alone. It is an event which was announced throughout the centuries and which reaches us even today. The real problem at hand is that man recognize it with love."

The Fraternity Spiritual Exercises are a privileged moment to regain awareness, to take ourselves seriously, to be serious with the needs of the heart in the way it was reawakened by the encounter with Fr. Giussani's charism. We cannot have a clear understanding of our destiny and even less reach it on our own; we cannot become aware of the path to destiny without Someone with us. Therefore, we go to the Exercises with the desire to know and live the encounter that introduced us to Destiny, that is, that reveals Destiny to us. To participate is not something to be taken for granted: it is a grace.

The Book of the month for March-April is *I passi della fede. Conversazioni domenicali* [The steps of faith. Sunday conversations], by Aleksandr Šmeman, La Casa di Matriona Publishing. It is a collection of radio broadcasted homilies by the theologian and Orthodox Russian priest Aleksandr Šmeman (a very close friend of Solženicyn). We propose this book as an 'encounter' with a great witness of the faith.

At this time we make ours Pope Benedict's exhortation from today to continue to pray, "pray for me, for the Church and for the future Pope," for the Cardinals that are going to elect him, that they may truly be concerned only with the good of the Church and of the faith. Let's start praying now that the Lord may give us a shepherd who will sustain us in our faith.

Veni Sancte Spiritus