

EPILOGUE

A flower cannot bloom without roots:
the fruitfulness of the charism

On 19 March 2005, the feast of Saint Joseph, the central diaconia of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation met in Milan to nominate a new president to succeed Giussani. By unanimous, secret vote, and with only one blank ballot, they elected Fr. Carrón, whom Giussani had chosen a year before to share his role in leading the entire movement, summoning him from Spain with the approval of his archbishop, Cardinal Rouco Varela.

The National Council of CL met immediately after the election. After they prayed the *Angelus* together, Fr. Carrón spoke about the prayer: “[Christ] entered history with this novelty that draws us along even today. [...] This history has reached us—this is the first thought that came to me today—through the person of Fr. Giussani, who is so dear to us. We would have been unable to say ‘Christ’ with this intensity—at least that is the case for me, I don’t know about you—without him, without the encounter with him, without being drawn along in this whirlwind in which I found myself, which today reaches its full import, without this preference that the Lord aroused before me and before all of us. Fr. Giussani drew all of us along with him, making us experience in a real way what Christ truly is. It was really him, it was in living together with him, sharing life with him, that Christ moved our lives right to the marrow, bringing us an intensity we could never have imagined.”

For this reason, he said, for them the movement had “never been like living an association, but it has been a sharing in his fever of life [...], sharing in this whirlwind of charity with which Christ reached us. [...] So we ask Fr. Giussani to keep on drawing us along with him, now that he is no longer limited by time and space, now that he is sharing in the lordship over everything, Christ’s own lordship, as we have already begun to experience. Now he is at work—we already see it, every day—more than ever.” Even in the pain of Giussani’s passing, Fr. Carrón reminded everyone that “we can look at this moment quite serenely, with certainty, without fear, without dread, not because we are good,

not because we are up to it, but in the certainty that he will never abandon us, as he never deserted any one of us throughout these years. Every one of us knows better than anyone else to what extent it is true that he gave his whole life—his whole life—for us, up to the last moment.”

For his own part, he said, “It is into all this mystery that my poor ‘I’ is inserted, from the time Fr. Giussani took his responsibility before God of bringing me here.” He was aware, he said, that “in answering Fr. Giussani’s invitation to come here, I was answering the Mystery present. [...] It is as if we were all taken up in a mysterious design.” He thought back to the final months of Giussani’s sickness and death, which “made us experience his paternity. All of us, drawn along by affection for him, were truly generated as children, because we had to surrender to that mysterious plan that was working itself out in him. I was the privileged witness of the development of his sickness in the last months, in which, instant by instant, we had to surrender to the way in which the Mystery was bringing it to fulfillment. In other words, we had to learn obedience to the Mystery in the way in which He brought Fr. Giussani’s life to its completion.”¹

Then he quoted a talk Giussani had given in 1992, after returning from an absence due to illness (“The greatest sacrifice is to give one’s life for the work of an Other,” see p. 827), observing that it seemed to have been written specifically for them. Reading it now gave him chills, he said, “because now we can truly understand the gravity of what he told us years ago.”² He was referring to a passage in which Giussani had said: “*To give your life for the work of Other*—as a historical, phenomenological matter—as a matter of appearances—this ‘other’ refers to one particular person [...]: I myself. But this I is destined to disappear. No sooner is the word ‘I’ pronounced than it fades away and is lost in the distance, because the historical, describable, photographable element, identifiable by its name and surname, is destined to disappear from the scene where a history begins. [...] We have thus come to a critical moment, which requires everyone to take stock of their own responsibility with extreme seriousness, as a matter of urgency, as a matter of loyalty and faithfulness. This is the moment for each one to take up his or her individual responsibility for the charism.”³

During the same talk in 1992, Giussani had also given the conditions for the continuation of the story of the movement: “I may dissolve, but the writings I leave behind and the relentless following (if God wants) of the people indicated as points of reference, as the true interpretation of what happened in me, will become the instruments for correction and reawakening. They will become the tool for morality. Their lineage, the lineage of the people indicated as reference points, is the most alive thing in the present, because even a text can be interpreted. It’s hard to interpret it incorrectly, but it’s possible.”⁴

This meant, Carrón went on, that his election as president of the fraternity was “the first occasion offered us to show our offspring. With this vote, you have shown you are his children, because you have followed what Fr. Giussani indicated as the point of reference.”⁵

During a retreat for *Memores Domini* novices in summer 1997, Giussani commented on Jesus’s words from Saint John’s Gospel: “It is better for you that I go,” saying: “This is like— how can I explain?— like a confession I think. Because I’m about to leave, too, I’m leaving (and you, too, you know! ... in fifty years you, too, will be on your way out). [...] When a friend changes bodily, visibly, when a friend we have traveled a stretch of road with tangibly changes, someone who has shouldered all our weariness after the confidence of our beginning wore off, this becomes a negative reason for our vocation and we may be inclined to think: ‘Now we will have less help, we’ll be less safe, we’ll be less...’ The disappearance of the contingent thing Christ used to enter our lives frightens us. If the person through whom we offered ourselves, who accompanied us dies, this becomes a source of fear, of dread.” But he did not share this view, Giussani said, and instead followed Jesus, because “it is better that this happens. When we lose our attachment to the way in which truth communicates itself to us, it is then that the truth of the thing begins to come clear.” This did not lead one to abstraction and detachment from concrete reality, because “Christ comes to us, the Mystery comes to us through extremely concrete things, through a humanity, through a human reality. And it doesn’t depend on someone being able to talk a certain way or on who you trust—it doesn’t depend on how tied to him or not tied to him the security from which you draw substance for your journey is. It depends on Jesus. This is our peace of mind: it depends on Jesus; you have entered into direct relationship with the mystery of Jesus, the mystery of Christ, that governs history through the lives He clasps.”⁶

Therefore, Carrón commented to the National Council, “in following this contingent point, you are really living a relationship with Jesus. It is not a matter of filling up the organizational chart. What is at stake is our relationship with Christ, our life itself!” He added, “We have before us the whole adventure of getting to know each other and becoming truly companions on our way to destiny. I want to be your companion on the way to destiny, nothing else. I don’t care about organizational charts. What I care about is walking toward destiny; I care about Christ, because only He is able to make me feel the thrill of an intensity of life that no organization can give me. I’ve no interest but this. The relationship with you interests me for this. I want to have true, honest relationships, and not formal ones, for this reason. I don’t care about anything else; I can’t bring myself to care for anything else, even though I may fail for the evil that is in me,

but what I have to surrender to, as awareness and as judgment, because of what I experience, is that there is there is nothing that interests my life like Christ.”⁷

Fr. Carrón’s first talk as leader of the Fraternity of CL concluded with words Giussani had dictated to his personal secretary, Gisella Corsico, in 1991, which she had read during a lunch they had with a group of friends in a restaurant near the Chiaravalle Abbey outside Milan: “A moment has come in which the affection among us has a specific weight immediately greater than even dogmatic lucidity, the intensity of theological thought, or the energy of leadership. The affection we have to carry among us has one single urgency: prayer, affection for Christ. For the moment has come in which the Movement walks exclusively in virtue of the affection for Christ that each of us has, that each of us invokes the Spirit to have.” To Fr. Carrón these words indicated the task that awaited the leaders of the movement: “This is our program, nothing else. This is our challenge. The Movement walks exclusively in virtue of the yes to Christ of each one of us, of each one’s affection for Christ. If this affection grows, then it is the hope for us and for the world, for the whole of mankind, because in this case we will go on, through our experience, like Fr. Giussani, to show the world who Christ is—not by words but through experience.” He closed with a prayer addressed to Mary and Giussani: “Let’s entrust our history to our Lady, ‘living spring of hope,’ and let’s ask Fr. Giussani, too—he who had each one of us and the whole world at heart—that, in these historical circumstances that he defined as ‘brutal loneliness,’ he hold us by the hand, for our good, and for the good of the world.”⁸

Fr. Francesco: “This is a cemetery and it seems like a public park. What joy!”

That March, Fr. Carrón received a letter from a friend in Torremaggiore (Foggia), Italy, who wrote that his wife had gone to Milan to visit the cemetery there, telling the family that she was going to see Giussani’s tomb. Their ten-year-old daughter Maria had asked her to leave a card at his grave on which she had written: “Dear Fr. Giuss, I must thank you for what you did for me and so many people. You gave me a family and friends. I ask you to pray for my dad, my mom, and all those close to me who are sad because you went to heaven. Thanks, I love you.” On the back she had drawn a flower with this caption: “A flower cannot bloom without roots. You are the roots and my family is the blooming flower.” The letter to Carrón concluded with these words: “I want to thank Fr. Giussani because by giving my life, unworthily, to that which made me love the flesh of Christ, He gave everything I love back to me.”⁹

Since the day of Giussani’s burial, Milan’s Monumental Cemetery has become the site of a constant stream of pilgrims who pause for a moment of prayer or attend Sunday mass in the chapel there. Milan Mayor Gabriele

Albertini made the decision to bury Giussani in the Famedio, the part of the cemetery built to house the most important figures in the history of the city of Milan. Albertini based his decision on the fact that Giussani “is one of the most powerful and humble figures of the post-war period. And not only in the religious sphere [...] but also for the social dimension he represents and the concrete goodness of his message, which is realized through the people who put it into practice.”¹⁰

Fr. Francesco Calvi, the chaplain at the Monumental Cemetery, is a privileged witness to the high volume of visitors who pass through the cemetery’s gates each day. As he told Paula Bergamini, a journalist for *Traces* magazine, “There is always someone at Fr. Giussani’s tomb. His presence this year has changed life here at the Monumental Cemetery. It brought many people back, many Christians, even people not belonging to CL. People come and ask where he is buried and stop just for a few minutes for a prayer.” Fr. Francesco knew Giussani only by name, but says that he always had “great attention and affection for him and for the Movement, because I know it did a lot of good. Now that I see so many people coming to pray, I have more and more admiration and attention.”

Since that 24 February 2005, Giussani “is never alone:” “On Saturdays and Sundays you cannot even get through. At times I have to go around the long way so as not to disturb them. During the mass, the chapel is always full. There are buses coming from all over Italy and even from abroad. They come, attend mass, recite the rosary, and sing at the tomb. They sing the ‘*Salve Regina*’ [...]. Most of them are young people; a lot of children with their parents. This I find very striking.” Fr. Francesco remembers that, two months after Giussani’s coffin arrived, “[o]n Easter Monday, during the mass there were all these children playing and jumping about, and I thought, ‘This is a cemetery and it seems like a public park. What joy!’ I remember that I had to tell them that we were near closing time. Usually, when I celebrate a funeral for an elderly person, there are very few people present, but when the opposite happens, it means that the person did a lot of good, like Fr. Giussani. This good is still happening, and the witness does not die [...]. The Lord has everyone taste the bitterness of death, but those who live well and stay close to Him have the consolation of His presence and His love, as it was for Fr. Giussani.”

People drop messages at the gravesite in large numbers, some of them petitions, some notes of thanksgiving, often apparently written on the spur of the moment on scraps of paper or pages torn from notepads. Fr. Francesco says that he finds the notes striking, too: “All these notes. Some are to say thank you, some are asking a particular favour” (three silver hearts on the tomb are signs of gratitude for graces received), “others ask simply the gift of faith, others are just a long list of people entrusted to Fr. Giussani’s protection.”¹¹

Below are a few of the thousands of messages left at Giussani's tomb.¹²

"Fr. Giuss, lead me! Help me to always have a positive and sure outlook like yours, that allows me to always recognize Jesus in the circumstances my life puts before me. Pray for me and my family, F. and my friends, especially for S., N. and family and A.'s grandmother."

"Hi Gius, I'm putting myself in your hands for the first year of my journey with the GA [Adult Group]. Pray for my simplicity."

"Dear Fr. Gius, I ask the Lord not to let me forget everything you taught me. With gratitude."

"Dear Gius, to you I entrust my baby who will be born in a few months. Help us to be parents and to stay united as husband and wife. Support us in our everyday life, so that we can live everything for Christ. *Ciao Gius.*"

"Dearest Fr. Gius, here I am, finally in front of your tomb to thank you for everything you did. I ask your help and your blessing for my children, and that you, through the intercession of Mary, give them the gift of meeting the movement and, in any case, that Christ be the centre and the meaning of their life and that you help them in their choices and their troubles, both physical and spiritual. I entrust all my motherly concerns to you, along with my life and that of M. at the beginning of retirement. May it be always be full of mutual love, faith, and joy, as you taught us. Thanks."

"Dear Fr. Giuss, please help me to be aware and grateful for everything I have met in my life. I beg you to help me to love others and look at them the way you looked at the world. I want to be gratuitous. Pray for my mom, my sister, my relatives, and my elderly grandmother, my colleagues at work, and all my friends. I want to love them all without asking anything in return. My life is for them. A big hug!!"

"Dear Fr. Gius, I come here today to ask you for the grace of the fulfillment of my vocation. Intercede for me so that if the Lord wants something different from what I want, I will not be afraid and will follow him. I ask you to pray for my friend J., so that she, too, can say yes to Jesus despite the pain and the troubles he is asking of her. I pray to you for my new job, so that I can overcome my insecurities and do great things. Help my heart and may I always be able to follow Jesus."

“Dear Fr. Giussani, we entrust our Fraternity to you, in particular the health of our friends F. and C. Please remember us as well, and our children and our families.”

“Intercede for my mother’s recovery and continue to accompany me and my family to recognize and love the hope that is present in this painful situation. Thank you for the grace that Christ gave me and gives me through you.”

“Dear Fr. Gius, intercede for me to Our Lady. I always ask you the same things! But even Jesus said it. I, too, can say, ‘Your will be done.’ I am already seeing the fruits of this surrender. I pray to you often – all the time! – for D., my sister, my brother-in-law, that God will fill their solitude and grant them the gift of faith. In addition to my usual requests, today I want to add L. (for the miracle of a recovery) and my entire family. G. that she finds a steady job. Protect everyone dear to me and keep watch over my Fraternity.”

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At the end of the mass celebrated in the Duomo of Milan on the seventh anniversary of Fr. Giussani’s death, 22 February 2012, Fr. Carrón announced that he had submitted the formal request to open the cause for beatification and canonization for the beloved priest from Desio. The petition was accepted by the archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Angelo Scola.

Some weeks later Fr. Carrón explained: “In order to answer a need that has arisen in the lives of many people, that is, to be able to invoke [Fr. Giussani’s] intercession in a proper way, which corresponds to the true nature of his charism, the Fraternity has requested and obtained from the competent church authority approval of an invocation intended for—take note— private devotion. This is the only kind permitted by the Church for Servants of God, which is what Fr. Giussani is at this time.”¹³

Below is the text of the invocation, which was printed on the backs of cards bearing an image of Giussani and the *imprimatur* of His Excellency Msgr. Angelo Mascheroni (Episcopal Vicar of the Diocese of Milan) on 12 April 2012:

O Merciful Father, we thank you
 For having given Your Church and the world
 The Servant of God Fr. Luigi Giussani.
 He, with his life lived with passion,

Taught us to know and love
Jesus Christ present here and now,
To ask Him with humble certainty that
“the beginning of every day be a yes to the Lord
who embraces us and makes fertile
the soil of our hearts
for the accomplishment of His work in the world,
which is the victory over death and evil.”
Grant, o Father,
Through the intercession of Fr. Giussani,
According to Your will,
The grace we implore,
In hopes that he
Will soon be numbered among Your saints.
Through Christ, our Lord. Amen
Veni Sancte Spiritus.
Veni per Mariam

Now it is God’s turn, once again.

“The one thing God has given me to understand above all else [...] is this: ‘Everything you have done, everything that came out of that first step you took at Berchet high school, everything that grew out of that elementary condition [...], everything that came about— it was I who brought it about,’ says the Lord.”¹⁴