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AN INTERVIEW WITH LUIGI GIUSSANI
by Giorgio Sarco, May 1979

TRACES

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THE ORIGINAL INSIGHT

What is Communion and Liberation, really—a social project, a culture, an educational strategy, or something else entirely?

Communion and Liberation is only an *insight* of Christianity as an event of life, and so as a history. From the beginnings of the Movement, it was always stressed that an idea, something valuable that is intuited, develops in a *method* of facing reality, which in its turn effects a change in all the relationships that one lives. In the same way, the Christian insight develops in a method of judgment and of living.

I believe that the history and the development that the Movement has had depend more than anything else on the focused authenticity of the original insight, that is, on the point of view that we started from in order to commit ourselves to the Christian fact. Remembering how this insight began in me awakens one of the most beautiful memories of my life. To be sure, the first insight that the horizon of existence is God's love began to shine in a spiritual situation that had been prepared by a family education and was then deepened in seminary life; but it really blossomed and reached awareness when I read and understood with real intelligence for the first time the beginning of the Gospel of John: "The Word was made flesh." I remember how my seminary professor, Father Gaetano Corti (who I think is now teaching the history of Christianity at the University of Trieste), used to explain this passage to us boys, saying that the cornerstone of reality and the center of the life of the person and of the world had become in Christ *a presence that could be met* by each one of us.

At that time, I was reading Leopardi with great enjoyment and passion and I lingered, in particular, on his *Canto alla sua donna* [*To His Lady*], which one of the greatest commentators, Levi, considers the key to the poet's entire spirituality. Up to that point, Leopardi had fallen in love first with one woman, then another, and yet another; but he understood that there was something else that he was seeking inside the face of every woman—namely, Beauty itself, to which no woman's face did complete justice. What broke forth from him at that point is what can rightly be called prayer, the prayer of an atheist: "If you are one of those eternal Ideas that the eternal mind scorns to clothe in solid form, to endure the pain

of our deathly life among fallen bodies . . . accept your unknown lover, in this hymn from this world of unhappy and brief days.” I began to understand the beginning of the Gospel of John, “the Word was made flesh,” comparing it with this poem that expresses, in a sense, the deepest level of human seeking. Man, often unwittingly, is a beggar for Beauty, for Truth, for Justice, without being able to find them anywhere. But Beauty made flesh, Truth made flesh, and Justice made flesh are among us: they are the Word of God; they are Jesus Christ.

From that same time of my life, and in the same vein, I also remember how the seminary rector, who is now the Cardinal of Milan, Giovanni Colombo, used to explain and comment upon the Divine Comedy, that work of genius that is so great an expression of a people formed by the experience of the Church.

Since then, the first time I heard, with a start, the original insight that had been clarified by the experiences of those years being repeated with the same accent, was in the encyclical of John Paul II: “Christ is the center of the cosmos and of history.” This, in fact, is the insight that I carried within through my whole life in the seminary. It was the whole reason I went to teach religion in the schools, precisely in order to communicate to young people that same truth that had struck me, and the need to change life in light of it.

Another factor that contributed to the growth of the Movement to make it what it is today was the kind of person that this insight was addressed to: the young, who in those years brought with them the freshness of their simplicity and their generosity and who communicated it, through the normal channels of a friendship, across all of Italy.

THE METHOD OF THE EXPERIENCE

You told us that at the beginning of the history of the Movement of Communion and Liberation, there is an insight which developed into a method of life and of presence, and you spoke to us about this insight. Could you now clarify what comprises the method which the insight followed as it grew?

Christianity is the proclamation that God became a presence that

can be met in history, like any factor of human existence. God became *recordable* in the reality of a sign that was the unique humanity of Christ two thousand years ago and that now, according to His will, is the unity of believers, the Church. It is by bumping into this sign that man truly has an experience of the presence of God.

So the method consists in this: that the insight becomes experience. The experience is, more than anything else, bumping into a sign, into an objective reality that moves the person toward his end, toward his destiny (and, in being moved in this way, the person is called to a change, to a conversion). The experience is the place where you see whether what was intuited makes a difference in life or not. The sign that man runs into is a calling. The presence of Christ in man's life today does not become something that makes a difference in history unless it is a calling that stirs his way of thinking about reality. In fact, it actually stirs his way of thinking about it and so it stirs the criteria he uses to evaluate and decide things.

The first methodological factor is the insistence on the certitude, essential to the kernel of the Christian insight, that Christ is the center of the cosmos and of history: this "clear word," this certitude in itself is shocking—and you can see it in this Pope—and contains a deep appeal that reveals the ongoing—even if unconscious—longing that man has for this proclamation.

The significance of the truth of this proclamation, its existential density, like everything in life, has to develop in an organic rule, in a systematic dynamism. Herein lies the importance of verification, the second methodological factor, which demands that a person who has heard a true proclamation must compare the flow of his own life with it; he must compare the fabric of his own needs, problems, situations, reactions, demands, and so on, to it. Only in this way does the encounter with Christ become a new point of view, a true and proper working hypothesis from which to see and face everything that the normal dynamism of day-to-day demands implies. This is why the approach of verification blossoms into a culture, that is, into a comprehensive and renewed understanding of reality.

A CULTURAL CHALLENGE

However, Communion and Liberation has often been accused of not understanding the importance of cultural mediation and of not appreciating it...

This accusation, I believe, most often derives from a narrow and ultimately small-minded understanding of culture. At the root of every truly great human culture, just as at the root of every truly great work of art or of every true philosophy, there is always a creative insight, which undergoes the rigor of a method. An approach that forgets the importance of the rigor demanded by every single object is sentimental, but a culture that systematically censures the original insight is abstract. In some ways, the beginning of the cultural approach of Christians is outlined in the exhortation of Saint Peter to “give the reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). This presupposes a query that comes from the world and reaches the Christian. To “give the reason,” it is first of all necessary that their hope be so evident that it strikes the onlookers, and takes the form of an encounter that obliges them to ask.

If this starting point is missing, there can be no construction of a culture in the dynamic of faith. Christian culture, in fact, is human passion awakened and empowered by the encounter. In the Pauline understanding, Christ is “the keystone from which all beings are ontologically suspended” (Huby). Existentially, this means that Christ is the only vantage point which can allow one to face any aspect of existence. Whoever understands this finds that he is suddenly transported into the heart of an authentic cultural position, even if the cognitive tools at his disposal are entirely inadequate to express the depth of the understanding that he has been given. What is written in Psalm 119 is absolutely true: “I have more understanding than my elders, for Your law, O Lord, is the object of my meditation.”

From the start, this global implication of Christianity is what gave rise in our kids to the passion and will to critically and creatively face the school environment, with all its harshness and hardships. Thinking back on it now, there’s a lot of naïveté to shudder about, but there

is much more to thank God for: the simplicity of heart we had in facing the dominant ideology in the high schools and in the universities, technically so much better equipped than we were, but so impoverished in its proposal for life and thus lacking in true culture.

In the objection leveled up until now against our cultural approach, I think there is a small-mindedness in understanding the method of creating a culture. What was missing in those who criticized us was an understanding of the fact that a global horizon and a unitary point of view are implied and ultimately demanded by any true commitment to study and research. At the deepest level, a cultural position is synonymous with an all-embracing passion for life and for the world. In fact, the aim of those attacking us was to oppose the affirmation that the reality of Christ is the cornerstone of a systematic and critical vision of the whole of human experience.

At the deepest level, the Christian cultural position thus brings with it a new form of the subject as such. So it does not replace any mediation, it does not permit any effort to be shirked, and it does not allow one to skip over the time that such an effort takes.

Some of the criticisms leveled against us arose from a justifiable concern that our cultural position and intentions might be identified with certain grand idealistic claims that were not expressed in a work, as if it were enough to have an insight to create culture, or even claiming to have had one. But the insight, if it is true, develops in a work. In any case, the danger certainly does not derive from our educational principle. The truth of this can be seen from the fact that many of our young people in those early years were among the best in their courses and in fact later made their careers in the scientific field. At this level, too, one must note the basic lack of generosity in the criticism coming from professional intellectuals who saw fit to pedantically judge the words and commas of the first cultural efforts of a group of young people, deaf to what they were starting to beg for.

Didn't the strong decision to start from the assertion that "Jesus Christ is the center of the cosmos and history" lead to an integralistic closure of the student communities, to a refusal to live the relationship with the

modern world and its culture, which has an entirely different motto?
Not at all. Let me explain by way of example: from the time I was a boy, my favorite poet was, as I said, Leopardi, because he asked in a breath-taking and authoritative way the question about ultimate meaning and thus about happiness, which I perceived to be the very essence of the human spirit. This kind of depth, the longing for God, defines our historical age, as it does every other age, since it is so connatural to the being of man as such. So being open to it is empowered by our certitude of faith.

Did Leopardi's avowed materialism pose a problem for you?

Absolutely not. The question that shook him was so powerful that it was impossible for the ideological insufficiency of the answer not to be immediately obvious.

Is the insight at the root of the Movement more ethical, more philosophical, or more poetic?

With the question put like that, I am tempted to say that it is more poetic. But I would like to say that it is simply religious. In the same act of awareness, you find the emotion toward the unity of being which creates poetry and the thirst for clarity of reason which is proper to philosophy. Von Balthasar says the same thing: the beginning of theology is an aesthetic perception, and the adventure of the form develops this perception, making it into a principle of comprehension. Moreover, I always repeat to young people, "What do we use to judge? We use the attraction for being that we are made of." This is why, even within a structured theoretical system, one must always single out the original insight which claims to express itself through a theoretical development. But, at the bottom, there is always an attraction for something experienced as true which gives bodily form to the theoretical affirmation. The fact that we had an active cultural position at the beginning of the Movement is due to this approach. Of course, its expression, its application, and its construction will take time, the use of all appropriate tools, and the needed humility, sacrifice, and risk.

In this strong decision to stress the importance of the original insight, wasn't there perhaps a danger of being irrational, of not valuing the rational factor of research?

Not at all. We have always said that the insight that “Christ is the center of the cosmos and of history” immediately triggers a research that demonstrates it. It is never an empty claim; it always has a reasonable and human content. The object of the insight is the truth, the foundation of being; and the whole breadth of life and of knowledge is where it is verified. What is irrational is the position that starts from an insight that refuses to develop in a critical confrontation with reality. Moreover, the object of the insight is not a vague feeling, but the Being that the rationality of nature and history emanate from. Our insight is so far from being irrational that it matches the way Saint Thomas (who is certainly not irrational) speaks about “intelligence.” In fact, for Thomas, intelligence is nothing other than the act by which man humbly and without presumption opens himself up to the truth and lets himself be filled with it. This original openness is so far from contradicting rationality that it is its proper starting point and its unavoidable premise.

Yet what you are saying, it seems, was perceived by no one, so massive was the ideological attack against CL.

No, there's no need to exaggerate. Some people did understand; we also had our friends. I want to mention La Pira first of all, who was possibly the first among all the people we met who truly understood us. Then I would mention, among the teachers at Catholic University, Professor Bontadini, and, in more recent years, Von Balthasar. Besides these, of course, there are many others, all of whom I can't name and whom I would like to thank.

But other cultural encounters have also been crucial for us, including those with the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and the ones with many others who have lived their human story with true depth.

SHARING IN WHAT IS HUMAN

In this regard, I was always struck by the accusation against CL that it represented a traditional culture (not in the true sense of the word, that is, of a link with the true roots of the life of the Church, but in the dusty, academic sense...).

From the very earliest days, we stressed the need to start from man, and we found companions among the greatest authors, from Péguy to Claudel, from Dostoyevsky to Thomas Mann, from Leopardi to Rilke. In fact, a correct cultural position is afraid of nothing; it encounters everything human and retains what is true without letting itself be diverted by ideology. The Gospel says this in an unsurpassable way: “The wise man brings forth out of his treasure things both old and new.” Thus, our people have navigated through the pages of Shakespeare or Pavese, fully sharing their human depth and finding the richness of that human question to which the only adequate answer is Christ. With what enthusiasm and with what a spirit of sharing did we read in those pages the story of man! All of our meetings used booklets prepared by the same young people who marked the readings that struck them the most, that they had found to be in harmony with their own experience and that exemplified a truth or something of value.

It’s possible to find in those booklets, for example, neo-romantic poetry or the theology of the Fathers, Newman and Guardini, and so on.

One can say that the method that you espouse starts from man or, better yet, from the depths of the human question which you clarify very well in The Religious Sense; at the same time, you are claiming that it is impossible to speak of man apart from Christ, apart from the encounter with Him. In other words, man is a question, and a question cannot be understood without implying its answer... It is only when the answer is found that the question becomes clear. The systematic conviction that guided our first steps, as the theme of a challenge to the dominant culture, is the cry of the rhetor Vic-

torinus as he proclaimed his conversion to the people: “When I met Christ, I discovered that I am a man.” What criterion can we use to evaluate the full proposal that comes from life, in the countless ways that this proposal bubbles up and forms? This criterion either looms as the original criterion that forms our “I,” like the face, the gaze that nature gives us as it pushes us into relationship with everything, or else it is given to us, constantly imposed on us by the dominant mentality. It is only possible for the being of the person, his capacity for judgment, to be saved if the first case is true: that the criterion is offered by the original face that makes up our “I,” the structure of our nature. This is the criterion that is manifested in what I call “elementary experience,” that is, the array of needs and indications that nature uses to impel us to compare ourselves to everything. This array of needs is what forms the query that is man. The person is ultimately thirst for truth, for happiness, for freedom, for complete fulfillment, and therefore thirst for adhering to what completes and makes him. “Nothing is so incredible as an answer to an unasked question” (R. Niebuhr). I always quoted this sentence to the kids because the first requirement for understanding the answer to what is human, which is what Christ claims to be, is to feel to the point of suffering one’s own unanswered human question. The encounter with Christ exalts this pain, as the sight of food exalts hunger.

And, in a sense, this is also the task of the Christian community as a concrete fact visibly present in the environment, as the Movement so strongly insists, because only meeting a different humanity opens a person up to reconsidering the human problem...

Undoubtedly, it also must be kept in mind that the community is the essential condition needed for one’s own “I,” for the person. If, on the one hand, the community, no matter how hesitant and weak it may be, is in fact the first impact with the sign of Christ, then, on the other hand, it is the *humus* where the reality of the person can develop self-perception and so is able to ask the true question.

INTELLECTUAL RESEARCH

This intuition is deeply modern and at the same time absolutely traditional. Moreover, I have always been struck by the fact that the first pages of The Religious Sense repeat in words that have been filtered through modern experience the opening notes of that great symphony on man, the Prima Secundae of the Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas. Who are the teachers who introduced you to this understanding, so unusual for the Catholic culture of the time, the traditional heritage of the Church?

Other than the names already mentioned, I would say it was the very climate of the seminary of Venegono, because even if they were not as brilliant as the people we've mentioned, everyone there was enlivened by the insight that the truth, and thus the new man, is helped to become aware of himself by the witness of the long Christian past, and there he finds himself pointed toward the true answer.

And your activity as a researcher and a teacher in the university was grounded on this basis. Would you like to tell us something about this aspect of your intellectual experience?

I did my dissertation on Reinhold Niebuhr. He is a singular person, uniting in himself keen sociological inquiry, philosophical depth, and the religious spirit of a great theologian. He represents the most mature and important result of North American Protestant theology of the 1930s and 40s.

The First World War and then the great crisis of 1929 called for a profound self-reflection critical of the naïve progressivist optimism that had hitherto permeated American religious thought, for example in the direction of the Social Gospel envisioned by Rauschenbusch. Niebuhr started from this spiritual situation and, in a sense, rediscovered the inherent tragedy of human existence and so developed a new theology usually defined as existentialist, but in its higher points it deserves to simply be called realistic, because of the extraordinary balance it deftly uses to simultaneously describe man's greatness and his misery. I later had the opportunity to stay in America for a long visit, during which I did

the research that was collected in my book *Teologia protestante americana: Profilo storico* [*American Protestant Theology: A Historical Sketch*].

What did a Catholic like you learn from Protestant theology?

First of all, the sense of limitation inherent in every human position. This is the springboard of every sound spirit toward an understanding of the existence of the divine. Connected with this is the sense of concreteness that in the best cases is not at all a flat pragmatism, but a zest for reality seen in all its factors, resulting in a realism in which respect for freedom is paired with an appreciation for all aspects of things. Another figure who greatly influenced me was Paul Tillich. Although his original formation was German, Tillich perfectly embodied the spirit of American Protestantism.

Is there any criticism that you as a Catholic would give to this admittedly fascinating theological approach?

Well, I think that there is an aspect, in fact the deepest one, of the thought of Niebuhr and of Tillich that cannot be developed in depth in a Protestant framework, unless it would take a path like that taken by Newman toward the Catholic Church. I am speaking precisely of the perception of limitation. Tillich says that human reality is a sort of boundary line where the history and the mystery of man meet—a boundary line, not a *sign*, and much less an efficacious sign where the mystery makes itself present (a sacrament). Thus, their thinking is, in the end, suspended in a vacuum.

Within *a priori* subjectivism, which is characteristic of Protestant thought, limitation almost inescapably ends up being referred, rather than to God, to the depth of the individual or to humanity as such, as can be seen in the various theologies of the death of God (for example, in Vahanian). The biblical message of salvation is reduced to a framework of insights, where a simple existential analysis of man occurs. In the Catholic tradition, on the other hand, limitation takes on an ontological and sacramental significance. Being breathes through the sign, proclaims itself in the sign, sustaining the form of the sign itself and establishing in it a power of an evocative and appealing reminder. This

is basically the Thomistic idea of the essence of things as a sign, out of which Being overflows and makes itself an encounter for those who seek the truth. This feeling of the objectivity of the mystery that detracts from the zest for the concrete, that is, for experience and verification, runs the risk of falling into a soulless pragmatism.

But a cultural interest in American Protestant theology was not the only one you had during the time of your studies and teaching. . .

No. There were three intellectual encounters during my years of theological studies: Newman, who introduced me to Anglo-Saxon culture and who had already begun to interest me since high school; Möhler and German Catholic theology of the 1800s; and then the philosophers and theologians of Russian Orthodoxy, especially the Slavophiles. In fact, for a while I also taught Eastern theology at the school of theology. Here, too, while my first contact was of course Dostoyevsky, I then read Khomyakov, who revealed to me the beauty and depth of the Russian Orthodox understanding of the Church. I read a lot of what you could find in those years on Eastern ecclesiology as it was being disseminated mainly by the Roman Jesuits at the Russicum College.

What exactly happened in this encounter with Eastern tradition?

There were two factors that especially struck me, two factors that are integral to our own Catholic tradition, but which are poorly remembered in the West. The first is the concept of transfiguration, which has remained one of the key factors of our discourse, and which means that whoever faces the world in Christ perceives and uses things in such a way (as a sign of Christ) that they are shown to be the dawn of a new day—that is, as the mysterious principle of the manifestation of Christ. In the West, this factor has been downgraded to a “manner of speaking” of a mystical theology that we can afford not to take too seriously (as if the mystic were a sort of foolish character rather than someone who goes deeper into the mystery which in itself sustains the life of every man). In this light, the use of things is like the real dawn of the experience of a new humanity and of a new world (“a new heaven and a new earth”). It is the first (dawning) manifestation of the full-

ness of truth and beauty that the sign points to. In fact, the new world has already begun with the resurrection of Christ and we have been granted to experience it.

The second crucial factor that I learned from the Easterners is the concept of *sobornost*, which is the development of a poorly emphasized virtue of communion. That is, communion is a required factor of knowledge; it is the factor that makes knowledge possible. Living in communion and a new (that is, authentic and true) knowledge of reality are interconnected, not, of course, in the trivial sense that the objects of knowledge are seen as materially different, but in the sense that their ultimate truth, their being for the final redemption becomes clear: the result is thus that things have a truly different face.

This is, in a sense, the same thing that one of the greatest secular philosophers of our time, Theodor W. Adorno, says, speaking of his Teoria critica della società [Critical Theory of Society]: “Looking upon the world from the point of view of a possible redemption.” But, in addition, Adorno was also of Jewish origin, having grown up in the faith of the prophets and the people of the Bible. It seems to me that one could also link the idea of the Church as “people of God” to the concept of sobornost.

To me it seems more accurate to speak of the idea of the Church as body of Christ, whose form as a sign is that of being a people. It was an idea that had fascinated us even before the Council and that we read about in *Mystici corporis*: from the point of view of an educational concept, the idea of a people completes the ontologically deeper idea of the body of Christ.

COMMUNIO

These things take us back to the way you had formulated the question of culture at the beginning.

Yes, in fact, culture tends to be the critical and full expression of the person's awareness of the whole of his own being. The community dimension, the dimension of a people, is an essential factor of this living whole. Com-

munity is thus a factor, a dimension of the person, not an organization or an assembly, and certainly not a collective that takes the place of the person. Incidentally, this is also the true meaning of the communitarian personalism of Mounier and Maritain, which is too often distorted either into the sense of a harmful individualism or of an exaggerated (and very non-Christian) emphasis on the collective. *Communio*, on the other hand, always begins with the ontology of the person.

We spoke about Protestant culture and Orthodox as well. Since you have such a lively sympathy for these religious traditions, why are you Catholic? From this point of view, what is decisive for me is the answer that Newman gave to the same question: because this is the unbroken tradition that began with Christ and His Apostles and reaches us now. Besides, the Catholic Church is the only one (along with the Orthodox) that preserves the original structure with which the Father chose to communicate Himself to mankind; the sacramental structure is rooted in the presence of God in Christ. And it is the only structure of the religious event that is completely, fully human. In fact, truth is attractive as the *adaequatio* between what is in front of us and the perception we have of ourselves. Now, in the sacrament of Christ, God comes forth toward man and becomes an encounter full of truth and even human fascination. Nothing exists that corresponds more to man's nature. But there's also another reason. It is precisely the respectful and admiring encounter I had with the spirit of Protestantism and the genius of Orthodoxy that allowed me to better understand how the Catholic Church is the only place where the Orthodox sense of communion and the Protestant zest for the concrete and for the individual can be harmoniously reconciled in a complete synthesis.

This cultural framework which you have illustrated for us was largely already built before the Council. What impact did the Council have on the Movement? Is there any truth to the accusation often leveled against Communion and Liberation, that it is stuck in a preconciliar position?

I still remember the surge of enthusiasm we had when we found themes that expressed the deepest content of our intellectual sense, our commitment, and our way of living, organically developed in the conciliar

documents as they gradually emerged. We felt the gratitude of those who hear the complete reason for their life being affirmed with more completeness and depth, with authority. I remember, for example, the party we had when *Lumen gentium* came out, which so magnificently, especially in the eighth paragraph, places the accent on the Church as a visible community able to be experienced and encountered—which was the soul of our effort. Likewise, *Gaudium et spes*, for its interest, its passion for the world, its admiration for human endeavors, even its perception of their ultimate sadness. This was also one of our characteristics, as could be seen in the passion our people had in thrusting themselves into a keen search for the truth in man, wherever and however it could be found. However, the truer this admiring passion, the greater is the perception of the ultimate sadness over man's incompleteness, which finds its hope for fulfillment only in the experience of Christ. In fact, one of the sentences I always used to quote was this: "I have not come to take away the law, but to fulfill it," which means to make it true. The law is the highest expression of the effort of man's intelligence and morality, which God does not spurn but takes on and fulfills in the mystery of His presence. No, you can't really say that we were not in agreement with the Council: after all, weren't the theologians whose books had formed us the fore-runners and experts of the Council? Think of de Lubac and Von Balthasar; and others could be added. There are various reasons for the accusation against us. Many protagonists of the *aggiornamento* in Italy were convinced that the Council had opened the Catholic Church to a system of thought borrowed from certain philosophical or sociological trends. We, on the other hand, while respecting all the human sciences within their own contexts, were convinced that the starting point that the Council was pointing us toward was the imitation of the mindset, the method that Christ had used in His life. Opening up to the world does not mean accepting (and certainly not uncritically) the world's ideologies; it means finding the desire for truth that motivates mankind. Besides, you could see how unfounded were the positions of those who, for example, used to accuse us of integralism as they waved Maritain's book *Integral Humanism* at every turn. I believe there is no doubt about the fact that if he were alive today and interested in Italian affairs, the great French philoso-

pher would recognize himself much more in our positions than in those of many of his followers from back then (and from now: think of the reception given to his *Le Paysan de la Garonne*).

AUTHORITY AND FREEDOM

The way that Communion and Liberation has used the word and the concept of authority has always given rise to a lot of difficulties. Possibly the most radical clashes have occurred over this, because the emphasis on authority has always appeared to the world to be something anti-modern, medieval, denying the freedom and independence of the individual. But you have always asserted that authority is what makes freedom possible. Would you like to explain this concept of authority better?

You are correct in saying that authority is what makes it possible for freedom to appear, because it is in front of its proper object that potency becomes act. In front of a more mature example of faith (in terms of clear ideas, of generous action, and therefore of an inviting proposal), freedom better sees its proper ultimate object and so puts itself in action. In the impact caused by a presence more drawn toward the ideal, the reasonableness and the appeal of what draws us and thus the possibility of following it to the end become clearer. This is why it is always by way of imitation that the dynamic of self-affirmation develops in a balanced and sound way. Translated into terms worthy of man, this imitation is called *following*. Following, therefore, is the way the person becomes aware of what matters, of what is of value. Far from being, as many have misrepresented it (as if this were our plan), an unreasonable surrender, following is the act that requires the exercise of intelligence more than any other, in order to see if and how to verify the proposal of what matters, as the one with authority personifies it. But for this exercise of reason to begin, one requires the original willingness to give credit to something new, at first only intuited, and to follow it. What makes following reasonable is the jolt that a true authoritative presence brings to one's life; this jolt is an unforeseen prod to get out of oneself and to have the courage to embark upon the human adventure. We have often iden-

tified this authority as grace, a gift, or to use more secular terms, as the emergence of a working hypothesis to be tested. Existentially, authority is the great hypothesis within which one begins to work. If authority is adequate, that is, true, if its proposal corresponds to objective truth, then, with time, a comparison with life verifies the accuracy of the hypothesis. This is why gratitude toward the teacher who introduces the person to the truth about life and so to the experience of freedom goes hand in hand with the growth of freedom that he experiences in life. This is not a doctrine that belongs to CL; it is the way the Church has always understood education. Even secular culture comes to the same conclusion when it is at its most observant. What psychologist would deny that this is the dynamic a child, and then an adolescent, follows in his relationship with his father and mother as he reaches self-awareness?

There is, however, a difficulty that many have pointed out: how is this absolutely free, charismatic conception of authority connected to institutional authority inside the Church with its hierarchical structure, where authority does not come from a free acknowledgment of it?

Following the Pope and the bishops and priests who are in communion with him does not mean following their human forms, but Christ through them. This is how the plan of God's Spirit followed in history and in our lives. In fact, they are the instruments that Christ has wished to use in order to come to everyone. Following becomes natural once you learn to see in them the full relationship with the authority of Christ, who alone is Master. Communion and Liberation is nothing but an attempt to pedagogically introduce the objective structure of the authority of the Church. It is precisely for this reason that it is a contingent attempt, and that it subjects itself to the critical scrutiny of those who bear authority responsibly.

RESPONSIBILITY IN THE CHURCH

Is it true that for years now the voices of the pastors of the Church in the East, of Wyszyński and Wojtyła, have been listened to and meditated

upon in Communion and Liberation?

Yes, for many years. And along with them are also less well-known figures of equally great spirituality and religious depth, such as Zverina.

Love for the Church, incidentally, is Catholic, that is, universal. Whoever feels it is aware of the need to communicate the newness that has made his life full to everyone. This is why, from the very beginning, mission has been an essential dimension of our Movement, even when it might have seemed to be a waste of energy that could have been useful to our nation. Our only presumption in all this was to do nothing but express the normal dynamism of Christian life. As Pigi Bernareggi, who was among the first of our friends to leave for Brazil, said, "Following makes it easy, almost obvious, to do what is impossible in the eyes of the world."

Is there anything that you would like to say to the members of Communion and Liberation to help them cope with the new responsibilities that come to the Movement from the Church's current moment of grace?

The problem is only to focus everything in an ever more intense and clear, critical, heartfelt, and generous way on the voice of the Pope. And this is why anyone who bears authority in the Movement has to be an example of authentic following of the voice of the Magisterium. In some sense, it is irrelevant who the person is that God uses to educate His Church, from the standpoint of the content of the truth. At the present moment in the Church, however, the human character of this Pope is itself a highly significant fact in terms of pedagogy. The people responsible for our Movement have the clear duty of identifying with the human character who is guiding the Church today, of identifying with the faith-filled human certainty that the Pope is living with the urgency to make Christ the key to the entire outlook on man and on the world. This Pope is teaching us a complete openness to man in his original concrete form, which is entirely different from an openness to the interpretations of man that by and large are accepted by the majority, ending up in a servile posture toward the intellectuals in fashion. If that original reference point is lost, man is betrayed in the end by following his

own prideful thoughts, “dreaming,” as Eliot says, “of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.”

You have always said that you want to build a fraternal dialogue and a common work among all Catholics. What would you like to say to all those quarters of the Catholic world which have opposed CL up until recently and which, perhaps as an effect of the new human climate that the beginning of this pontificate has ushered in, are starting to rethink their position?

We have always wanted to build unity among Christians, not for reasons of politics or power, but because what gives glory to God in this world is precisely that impossible unity. This is the miracle: *signum elevatum in nationibus* [a sign held high among the nations], as theology says. We would gladly vanish in order to create this unity.

And what about pluralism?

True unity is created by going to the depth of one’s own human position, to the point of finding what lies deepest: that which unites us. It is at this level of depth that unity and pluralism are found. Unity between you and me comes about because each of us goes to the depth of our own human experience, and there finds the face of Jesus Christ. This is why, when I ask everyone to commit himself to unity, I ask everyone at the same time to go to the depth of his own experience of truth and to truly love each and every experience of others. Only this makes one able to be truly corrected. If you will permit me to say so, with very few exceptions, we never received true correction: a great deal of criticism, to be sure, but there was almost never anyone who took us in, motivated by an obvious desire to help us go to the depth of the experience of truth that we were trying to live. Anyone who loves the ideal wants nothing more than he wants to be helped through correction. But correction helps when a person feels loved as he walks his own pathway toward the ideal.

I would like you to comment on an expression I heard you using recently, namely, that authority’s task is not to make the organization grow,

but to bring about the truth of each individual.

The task of authority as such is to develop the faith, hope, and love that an individual or a group is living. The community has to be organized, but only in furtherance of this task; otherwise, it becomes a project of human wisdom that wipes out the action of the Spirit and tends in reality to create uniformity, even when pluralism is given lip service. And cultural and mental uniformity is the cemetery for every form of genius, that is, for *charism*. Authority is like a father who has many children: he can't help but speak with esteem for each one, and as he affirms the individual character of each child, the unity of the family is assured.

When I got married, you told me to pray to the Blessed Virgin. I've been meditating on this ever since.

Christianity's genius lies in its fidelity in perceiving the figure of the Blessed Virgin. She is where the method that God used to save the world becomes clear. The biggest characteristic of the method God used in history in dealing with man is gratuitous choice, election. From the human point of view, at no other time was this gratuitousness manifested in its complete sovereignty as it was in Mary. The fact that we have been chosen is the sign of God's absolute freedom. Secondly, Mary is the mother of the new world, and since the new world is made of the moral, spiritual, and physical character that is hers, it is made of her. Through Mary's *fiat*, access has been granted to the miracle of man's freedom and of the meaning of the cosmos and of history. God's plan chose to wait upon that *yes*, spoken by her freedom. Finally, Mary is the total paradigm of Christian life. Christ is everything, but He is born into the world through her. So it is for us: everything is given by the power of the Word made flesh, but it is through our physicality that Christ shows Himself to the world. Total openness to Him showing Himself depends upon just one word: *memory*, living the memory of the encounter with Him in order to live the openness to recognizing Him anew every day of our lives. And who more than Mary lived in the memory of this presence?

When the Pope visited with CL, he welcomed you as an old friend. Among other things, he said, "Your proposal has met with support, though amid

conflicts and opposition, and I know that you have also suffered. Then, amid conflicts and opposition, you have seen converging upon you and taking their place at your side other young people, for whom your example has opened up new horizons of dedication, self-fulfillment and joy... It is important that you should continue to proclaim [Christ's] word of salvation with humble courage." Then he set aside the speech that had been prepared and spoke off the cuff, recalling the many encounters through the years which marked the stages of a friendship. Could you tell us how this friendship was born?

Actually, more than a personal friend of mine, the Pope has always been, since he was Archbishop of Krakow, a friend to many of us. I only met him once, at Kro cienko, but he has had countless meetings with our kids who have been on pilgrimage in Poland.

I would also say that this encounter, like almost all decisive facts in the life of CL, was purely coincidental. Just as CL spread across Italy from Milan because our vacations allowed us to meet people of the same age from other regions and to communicate to them our passion for the experience that we were living, so did some of us meet other people in Poland who were living the same reality, formed in accord with the same deep intention that we were experiencing here in Italy. I'm talking about Father Blachnicki's movement which was then called "Oasis" and now goes by the name of "Light and Life."

This experience was a fortuitous and surprising answer to an unconscious need, to the demand and passion for mutual recognition in the same faith, and so in the shared esteem given to one's being, life, and everything.

Furthermore, forming our small or large communities also responded to the same demand. This working openness, this positive restlessness of our eyes and hearts as we longed to find anyone who believed and who wanted Christ to be man's life, did not allow us to let any opportunity escape when it presented itself.

Likewise, besides what's going on in Poland, we've also become a part of what's happening in Latin America and Brazil as well. In fact, an intense missionary presence of our Movement has taken root.

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cover: A GS (Student Youth) meeting in the Sixties, in Ravenna, Italy.

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