

**Notes on the Announcement of School of Community
with H.E. Filippo Santoro
in video conference from Milan, February 9, 2022**

Text: L. Giussani, To Give One's Life for the Work of Another, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022, pp. 5-14.

Davide Prosperi

Good evening everyone! At last we are together again to begin the work of the School of Community on the new text that will accompany us in the coming months: *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*, Fr. Giussani's latest book. As promised, we have with us His Excellency Monsignor Filippo Santoro, who, in addition to being Archbishop of Taranto, is also the Special Delegate of the Holy Father for the *Memores Domini*. This evening he will introduce the first part of the book to us (from page 5 to page 14), which we will be working on during these weeks until the next meeting on March 23rd.

Filippo Santoro

I would start with a prayer, because without the gift of the Spirit we would not be able to understand everything we say to each other, that we communicate to each other, as a message addressed to us, as a proposal for our life. So, let us invoke the Holy Spirit.

*Come Holy Spirit
Veni Sancte Spiritus*

I, too, greet you all: good evening from here, good morning or good night to the other parts of the world; we are all united together at this moment to go deeper into the text of Father Giussani *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*.

It is precisely because of the work of Another that I find myself here presenting the text of the next School of Community and, above all, why I find myself in charge of the *Memores Domini* as Special Delegate of the Holy Father, in obedience to his explicit and cordial request.

Never had I imagined I'd find myself undertaking these two extremely serious and unexpected tasks. I am already very busy with the archdiocese of Taranto and my social ministry, which culminated in the 49th Social Week of Italian Catholics held in Taranto in October and which saw the participation of almost all the Italian dioceses.

I have already said at the *Memores Domini* Advent retreat that Pope Francis' request had the same weight as the request made to me by Fr. Giussani in 1984, when he asked me to serve as a missionary in Brazil with a very simple and clear invitation: "Would you like to go to Brazil?" I felt my freedom being challenged, not by a call to duty, but by an unmistakable voice which was asking me to entrust myself anew and totally to the One I had begun to become familiar with and who was offering something more to my life. With a youthful heart and spirit I said yes, and I was at peace even despite the sacrifice that was being asked of me: leaving my elderly and sick mother, my diocesan commitments and so many friends. It was a question of following another, despite my plans. The same thing happened with the Holy Father's invitation, provoking me to answer again with all my freedom.

The new task began with a surprise: I found myself immediately struck by an extraordinary light, borne out of the "yes" of 52 novices of the *Memores* who asked me to make their profession with a freedom, a truth and a beauty that document that the charism is alive. Beautiful young men and women with successful careers, who claimed that the truest way to live is to give oneself totally to Christ, because in Him is the fullness of life. This light illuminated all the meetings I had with the *Memores*, starting from the houses in Taranto and in some regions of southern Italy, and then in Spain,

meeting the *Memores* of the United States via video, and finally in Latin America, where I met my Brazilian friends in person and all the others via Zoom.

At this time, listening to people's lives comes before any canonical or juridical intervention, even if the latter remains necessary. My "I" is implicated, and all this leads me to a personal work on the School of Community, which gives a new flavor to my life and to the commitments of my episcopal ministry. To get down to the concrete, all of us should take at least ten minutes every day to work on it, so that our lives can take on a new direction. Without our freedom being called to a work, there is no personal growth. As a priest and bishop, I have the liturgy, the breviary, the rosary, the poor, the priests, the task of taking care of Taranto's unjust conflict between the protection of health, of the environment and of employment; but, in all this, I do not give up my ten minutes of School of Community. It is truly a source of relief and of great reprieve, and, at the same time, a work.

Within the novelty which unexpectedly occurred in my life, I have the task of presenting to you tonight, while trying to be brief, the first part of the text which repropose the 1997 Exercises of the Fraternity.

For the many amongst us who were not there at the time, it is appropriate to contextualize that circumstance now distant in time. That time Fr. Giussani, unlike all his previous speeches, did not speak off the cuff. We were accustomed to "seeing" a live speech which would "happen" before our eyes, even if based on the outline, the notes, the quotations and the letters that Father Giussani used to gather the weeks and days before, with the faces of his people in his heart. Because of the limitations brought on by his illness, that year he chose to write out his speech and subsequently recorded it before a group of friends. The video that was proposed therefore had a particular density to it, typical of a text conceived word for word.

Moreover, as he himself said, that speech wanted to represent the content of an awareness matured during those years, a culmination of his thinking, of his way of living the Mystery and the Christian event. The rich preface by don Julián Carrón goes in this direction to introduce us to the text.

We are therefore undertaking a work together that is certainly demanding, but even more fascinating, I would say almost intriguing.

Introduction

Let us first approach the Introduction of the lesson with great attention, because, in a certain sense, it contains the heart of Fr. Giussani's proposal (from p. 5).

1. First of all, Fr. Giussani identifies a historical moment, the death of Louis XIV of France (in 1715) as the sign of an era in which **rationalism** takes over: man, now without boundaries, claims to be the measure of all things. This journey is now practically complete today: rationalism represents by now a general standpoint. I saw evidence of this in Taranto when the Dean of the University of Bari inaugurated the Faculty of Medicine, quoting the sophist philosopher Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things." Taking the floor, I made an aside. They had only asked me to give a blessing, but I did not feel like keeping silent. So I said, "Well, the Dean mentioned Protagoras of Abdera, but since we are in Taranto, capital of *Magna Graecia* and home of the Platonic philosopher Archita, I cannot fail to quote Plato, who in his work *The Laws* stated that "God is the measure of man." In short, we must defend ourselves, and attack!

2. Faced with the prevalence of rationalism, what happens? The Church withdraws: **it is entrenched on the pastoral level**, to defend the "morality of the people." Therefore, it is committed to pastoral work, to improving the lives of its people etc.

3. Let's be careful! Committing oneself to pastoral work is good, but here it has been done **by taking for granted the evidence—for a believer—of the dogmatic content**. As if to say: "we already know this, let's commit ourselves to action, full stop."

4. Father Giussani adds, "thus, the faith of God's people tended to lack defense and nourishment. It is **through cultural work** that a people's life consolidates and bears historical fruits, either for or against the Christian tradition that built up Western civilization." (p. 5)

Let us focus on these passages from p. 5 which I have just read to you, to see how fitting they are in reading the “world” in which we live, as well as in representing the way in which most of the Church presents itself and the way in which conceive and live our Christian existence.

First point. We live in a world where reason claims to be the measure of all things. Have we not reached a point today where this claim takes on features that only a few prophetic voices could have foreseen 25 years ago? Even the beginning and the end of life, the nature of marriage, the sexual identity of a person, are not a “given” to be accepted anymore, they are not recognized as given by the Mystery, but depend on the rationalistic arbitrary will of man.

Second point. “The Church, too, attacked by rationalism, stressed ethics to the people and in her theology, taking ontology for granted and almost obliterating its originating force” (p. 10). The Church emphasizes ethics: “behave well,” forgetting ontology; not forgetting it, but giving it a secondary importance. Therefore, the emphasis is on morality, lived by each person according to his or her own good reasons, according to the characteristics of the context in which he or she lives, according to his or her own sensitivity. Here, then, is the emphasis on the Church as defender of the family and life, of the poor and social justice, of sexual identity and morality, of the environment, and the list could go on.

Let me be clear, these are all valuable highlights, but the problem is when such moral (or pastoral) content becomes the very heart of the Church’s “good news.” It is like saying that a train’s speed depends on the carriages and not the engine! It is right to be committed to all those things, but there is a driving force that determines the quality of judgment on all those aspects.

Third point. Here then is the third step: the neglect of the dogmatic element, of the content of the Christian announcement. “I believe that the genius of the movement that I saw coming to birth,” wrote Fr. Giussani in his last letter to John Paul II in 2004, “lies in having felt the urgency to proclaim the need to return to the elementary aspects of Christianity, that is to say, the passion of the Christian fact as such in its original elements, and nothing more.” (*Traces*, no. 4/2004), the passion to return to the fundamental aspects of Christianity.

Fourth point. The fourth passage of the Introduction is then surprising: taking dogmatic content for granted (ontology, he will say in the lecture) is made to coincide with the disappearance of cultural activity, which deepens and generates the life of the people. Why is it important to note this passage? Because it reveals that the root of culture lies in ontology, in Being, in the Event. Culture—Fr. Giussani said several times—is identified with the “*for whom one lives.*” This means that the defense of life and the family, love for social justice and the protection of the environment do not represent the heart of the Christian’s cultural activity, but only the implications of an ontology that must be recognized and lived.

Before moving on to a suggested interpretation of the two lectures of Fr. Giussani, I would like to conclude this Introduction by dwelling on a **methodological aspect** that I was able to notice while calmly reading the text. It is a text that should be meditated upon and read calmly. What is this methodological aspect that I want to highlight?

We do not know what is written in these pages. Let us start from the realistic hypothesis that we *think* in another way: we are fully immersed in the reduction of the Christian fact denounced in this text. We think as everyone thinks, and therefore the work of the School of Community is very important.

As Fr. Giussani once said to a group of leaders of the Movement (I quote from memory), “your problem is not consistency, it is not a lack of commitment. It is a problem of mentality: you do not think as I think.” What is needed, then, is a conversion of mentality.

Let's not be scandalized by this judgment; on the contrary, it clarifies the nature of the path we are once again taking today: it is a **school**, a "School of Community." And, as in every school, there is the effort to understand, there are those who can help us more than others, there is a dialogue in which the achievement of one becomes the heritage of all. That is why it will be possible to ask questions, which we will answer next time, if something is not clear in my explanation, to help us grasp the points of a change in mentality.

Let us now move on to the first lesson.

"GOD IS ALL IN ALL"

1. A New Beginning: Ontology

First of all, I would like to point out that this lesson, as well as the next one, *is full of questions*. Father Giussani asks questions one after the other, he challenges us precisely to unhinge a certain way of thinking. He asks himself the most radical questions, those of a man who, on the threshold of Mystery, thinks about the mystery of his own existence, of his own being. In this age of the pandemic, we have all been called to think about the mystery of our lives. We have escaped it, we have come close to it, we have lost so many friends, so many dear, dear people, and how can we not be shaken by the question about the Mystery and the mystery of our lives? How do I talk to a friend with three children who lost her young husband because of Covid, if we don't face the Mystery and the mystery of our lives? If we don't empathize with this vertiginous position, if we don't face the drudgery of a journey, of a work, the answers we will find along the way will not be grasped in their truth and beauty. Well, the first lesson approaches a radical question: "**What is God for man?**" Saint Paul gives the answer: "God is all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

The starting point, then, is **ontological**: we must begin from reality as it is: "for man, God is everything"! (See p. 34).

But Fr. Giussani immediately hastens to say that, if "God is all in all", man is not nullified (as if to say: He is everything, therefore we are nothing), but on the contrary, man is exalted. He expresses this in two ways:

- "When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?" says Psalm 8. And Fr. Giussani comments, "yet we are that level of nature where nature lives in the awareness of itself" (p. 6). Our "I" is **self-awareness** of the cosmos.

- And further on he says: before this "all," "before this Lord, the human I is **thirsty** for Him" (p. 6). The "I" thirsts for eternity.

Therefore, before Saint Paul's affirmation—"God is all in all"—, we are characterized by these two elements: **self-awareness** and **thirst**. Here lies the essence, the ontology, the greatness of man: self-awareness and thirst, that is, desire.

2. Two Temptations: Nihilism and Pantheism

Here Fr. Giussani gets to the heart of the matter, insisting on beginning from ontology: "but if God is all, what am I? What are you? [...] flowers, and stars [...] what are they? [...] reality as it appears to our experience, that is, as it appears to man's reason [...] is made by God, it is made "of" God [which is the consistency of reality]. Being creates out of nothingness, that is, shares Himself" (p. 7), gives being to all; further on he says that man is created as a "participated being" (p. 12).

From here derives "the perception that reality is contingent on the fact that reality is not self-made" (p. 7), as we have constantly repeated in these years, referring back to Chapter Ten of *The Religious Sense*.

And yet man slips away from this vertiginous perception (that in this moment I do not make myself). Instead of the wonder of being made in this instant, one slips elsewhere; instead of consciousness and thirst, man gives in to the temptation of thinking that things are illusory and that nothing has

consistency. Instead of self-consciousness and thirst, the temptation to slide towards nothingness emerges.

In this way, the two great temptations that affect our lives creep in, just as they have affected the whole of human history:

- **nihilism**, whereby the things you have, the people you live with, are nothing, they have no ultimate consistency. It is not that they are nothing, but they do not have an ultimate consistency;
- or **pantheism**, for which the self is an indistinct part of the whole, of the “great sea” in which we will be definitively reabsorbed on the day of our death (p. 7). An indifferent, undifferentiated dissolving of our being, a dissolution within a void, while desiring a personal eternity, a desiring that this life of mine continue.

Mind you, these are not primarily theories, but “practical” positions, into which we inexorably slide. What is the existential consequence of nihilism and pantheism? Here, Father Giussani offers a passage that at first surprises us, but which—if we look carefully—becomes a beam of light that lays bare the dynamism of life, both social and personal. “[...] if you burn the content of [your own] experience by saying that you are nothing [nihilism], or that you are an indistinct part of total being [pantheism], then there is nothing outside you, you are the sole owner of yourself” (p. 9). It is as if to say: my life depends on me. Thus, in the face of the mechanical impact of circumstances, all that remains is the exercise of **power**, a dual power:

- a power “tends to be dictatorial; it is asserted as the only source, the only form of ephemeral, but possible order” (p. 8). If there is no ultimate consistency, as there is a lacking in ultimate consistency, only those with the most power count. This of course applies *to the few who make it*. And this is the spectacle we have before our eyes: from the strong economic powers that regulate the world, to the power of the judiciary or the newspapers, to the grotesque personalism of many party leaders;
- but there is a second aspect: *most, of course, do not make it*. And they are left with a life of slavery: slaves to the power of others. If there is no ultimate consistency of things, those who have more power dominate.

At this point, Father Giussani puts us on alert, because power is not only that of the State or the Region. What he says is valuable: “the more you belong to a small, narrow society, the more you depend on those who hold power in it.” This should warn us about how we live in our family, in the business we work in, even in our community or Fraternity group. “Any relationship becomes power, violence” (p. 10). So, the assertion that everything is nihilism or pantheism is not innocent, but it is to assert a small great power, instead of welcoming the other as a gift from Being, a gift that refers back to that Mystery which is at the origin of all things.

3. The Existence of the I

In the third passage, nihilism and pantheism are taken from the point of view of ontology, on the one hand, and ethics, on the other. Nihilism and pantheism, in fact, insofar as negations of reason, reductive simplifications of reality, elude the great question of man, which once again returns: “How come I am here?” The question is irrepressible: “how come I am here?”, “How do I consist?” “This question identifies the ontological [...] level of the question. On the contrary, nihilist or pantheist rationalism has exasperated precisely the ethical incidence of the question, reducing everything to the affirmation of man [reducing everything to the individualistic affirmation of self]; and the affirmation of man is [...] a violence towards oneself, and the mystery of the world” (p. 10).

On this thought are grafted the three words that describe the mysterious existential condition of each one of us. As you can see, it really takes an invocation of the Spirit to follow the path! These are all dense, but extraordinarily beautiful, powerful passages!

Freedom

First of all, Fr. Giussani tells us something surprising. Man, we have seen, is a sharer in the God who is all in all; not a part, not a little piece of God, but a sharer in God because he receives being from

God. There is a point at which, however, his being “withdraws” itself from being inevitably participant in Being: freedom.

This is the true mystery of creation: the Mystery has created something that is not identified with Itself. “Freedom is the only thing that appears to reason as being outside God.” Certainly, “if Being, God, is everything, freedom is to acknowledge that God is all.” In fact, “the Mystery wanted to be recognized by our freedom [I can say: ‘I recognize You,’ but I can also have the foolishness not to recognize Him], It wanted to generate Its own recognition” (p. 11). God, therefore, wanted to take this risk. Here is the true mystery of creation. Think what a daring lunge freedom is! God created something that can say no to Him, that can tell Him that He has nothing to do with daily life, that He has nothing to do with the present, that He has nothing to do with the encounters we have had, that He has nothing to do with all that there is; but that can say that only we, small or great servants of power, are at the center of it all.

Asking for Being

“So, as freedom, the nature of the participated being expresses itself [...] as *prayer*,” which existentially “is entreaty, ‘entreaty to be’ [I ask for being, so at first we asked the Spirit. *Sine tuo numine nihil est in homine*, without your power there is nothing in us, nothing healthy, nothing holy, nothing saved]. God wants there to be someone who asks to be” (p. 12). And, if we look closely, everything that the participated being does (“whether you eat or drink, whether you sleep or are awake, whether you live or die”) is in itself prayer, a request to be, that is, a request for fulfillment. Therefore, the affirmation of the novices who made their profession—“because in this ‘yes’ there is the fulfillment of my life”—is asking for fulfillment, it is always a request: “accomplish my life, with all the fragility of which I am made; fulfill me, fulfill my being, fulfill what I am.”

Sin (The Choice of Extraneousness)

Faced with this request of being, and together with this request of being, there is a third aspect: sin, which is the choice of extraneousness. Not recognizing that God is everything is sin. “Sin is any action in which being able to say ‘God is all’ becomes an objection” (p. 13).

As with Adam and Eve, sin is following a stranger, something extraneous to our experience. What was the extraneous thing? The serpent, the tempter. “When man rebels, he adheres to a reality that is extraneous to his being, adheres to ‘the world’, as Jesus says, that is, the sum of power” (p. 14). Here, then, is the choice of extraneousness: adhering to, giving oneself up to the stranger, giving oneself up to the foreigner, giving oneself up to the dominator, giving oneself up to the liar, giving oneself up to power; this is sin as the choice of extraneousness.

Thus, life, instead of finding peace, and even joy also in the saddest situations, becomes slavery: one becomes a slave to the world, and—note well—the more successful one is in their career, the more this slavery becomes patent to the point of considering ourselves the masters of the world. Doesn’t this describe the human journey of those of us who dominate in this world? There is a real need for such simplicity and humility, like that of those who recognize that they are in their place and at peace in life. Again, during the gesture of the *Memores* profession, a novice gave me this testimony: “I was at the hairdresser’s and the girl who was doing my hair told me, ‘I am happy when you are here, because you are at peace, you are in your place. I would like to be like you.’” To be at peace, as an affirmation of self, and not to surrender to the stranger, to extraneousness, to sin. Think what it must mean for a novice in the profession! But let’s consider it for ourselves too! God is all in all because he has to do with a hairdresser, he has to do with life, with so many situations. This is the ultimate, true and strongest consistency of our being.

“See how many masters have those who do not want to have the only Lord,” said St. Ambrose, quoted by Fr. Giussani on page 14. This is the conclusion reached by nihilism and pantheism. But just before Fr. Giussani had reminded us of all the positivity of those who live in the recognition that God is everything: “[they are] glad; we find gladness, or anyway peace, even in the saddest situations” (p. 14). The consistency of life is a source of gladness; it is a source of peace. Exactly as a Spanish

friend wrote to me: “they tell me, ‘you look better than ever!’; and a friend with whom I ate the other day could not believe that my tumors had doubled. So, I told her, ‘You equate being content with having no problems and everything going well.’ ‘Mission is accomplished in the offering of yourself to Christ.’ This means that any circumstance is for my maturation; and if I live united with Jesus, I am helping Him in Redemption. I’m so happy because of this certainty that my life is for something, and I wouldn’t give that away for anything.” The point is not to not have problems, but who we are with. Who are you with? With Being, with the Being that makes your person, makes it now, makes it forever, and gives it substance. That’s why the friend says in amazement, “You look better than ever!” and yet the cancer has doubled! “If I live united with Jesus, I am helping Him in Redemption.” We are helping Him in the redemption of the world, and we are helping ourselves on a journey of a new humanity, a different humanity. “I am so happy because of this certainty that my life is for something, and I wouldn’t give that away for anything”: she feels loved within a condition of fragility, because right there a love emerges in all its essence, its power, its closeness.

This is the path we have learned by living—in the Church and in the Movement—in the company of people who have devoted their life to the human glory of Christ, in a path of holiness that the Church is acknowledging and that belongs to our history. Together with Fr. Giussani, I want to recall just a few names: Enzo Piccinini, Andrea Aziani, Francis of Uganda, Edimar of Brazil, Novella Scardovi, Fr. Paolo Bargigia, Fr. Pigi Bernareggi, Pier Alberto Bertazzi; there are many, even recent ones, in which the miracle of Being is documented.

God is all in all and God is forever. God is in our life, which is embraced forever and is never abandoned. And freedom is saying yes to him. Even in these times of revision of the Statutes of the *Memores* and of the Fraternity we are immersed in a history of grace, in a history pervaded by the presence of the living charism, a sign of the love of the Lord, a grace recognized by the Holy See, with the esteem and personal affection of the Holy Father.

Good work to all and thank you for your attention.