



CHARITY: IS IT POSSIBLE TO LIVE THIS WAY?

A discussion on charity on the occasion of the publication in the United States of Msgr. Luigi Giussani's new book:
Is It Possible to Live This Way? Vol. 3: Charity

Speakers: **Lorenzo ALBACETE**—Theologian, author, columnist
Julián CARRÓN—President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation
Stanley HAUERWAS—Christian Theologian and Ethicist, Duke Univ. Divinity School

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Albacete: In the name of New York Encounter, activities open to the public, taking the opportunity of what is going on for the members of the movement of Communion and Liberation in the United States—kind of like a national convention which has the name *Diakonia* which means service, the people who lead the movement, who serve, all of those who are associated with the movement. On the occasion of that weekend, local people put together New York Encounter with activities open to the public at large, and this is one of them.

We begin with songs. Msgr. Luigi Giussani, founder of Communion and Liberation and author of the book we are presenting said that if you cannot sing about it, it's not true. So we have been taught to appreciate the role of singing. This is one of the signs of the presence of Christ—song. The first one is in Spanish, *Razón de Vivir*, (*Reason for Living*), and the second one is *I Wonder as I Wander*.

[Songs]

Our first speaker is Professor Hauerwas. Professor Stanley Hauerwas is the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University, where he also holds joint appointments in the Schools of Divinity and Law.

Named by *Time* magazine in 2001 as 'America's Best Theologian', Stanley Hauerwas has been known to many as a theological provocateur on topics ranging from care for the handicapped, the church as a political community, narrative theology, medical ethics, and peacemaking. He is a central figure to the recovery of virtue ethics in philosophical theology in recent decades. Hauerwas delivered the esteemed Gifford Lectures at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland in 2001, which formed the basis of his book, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*. His book, *A Community of Character*, was named one of the 100 most important books in religion in the 20th century. Prof. Hauerwas...

Hauerwas: The third volume of Father Giussani's trilogy, *Is It Possible To Live This Way?* rightly climaxes with an account of charity. This is not surprising because charity, as Aquinas emphasized, is the form of all the virtues. Given the way many now live Christians will only be able "to live this way" if our lives are constituted by charity.

Moreover by focusing on charity as the "third leg of the Christian stool" or "the third column that holds up the great temple of God that is the world," Father Giussani makes clear that charity moves the sun and the stars. In this book Giussani displays his remarkable ability to hold together the metaphysical and the moral claims that are at the heart of the Christian faith.

For I take it that one of Giussani's great gifts is to show the concrete implications of fundamental metaphysical convictions and the metaphysical implications of our practical commitments. Giussani rightly thinks and shows that when we get the way things are wrong, we get our lives wrong; and when we get our lives wrong, we get the world wrong.

Giussani, like Wittgenstein, has the ability to make a remark that invites rather than ends thought. What he says may often sound like a truism, but *how* he says what he says enables us to dwell on the significance of the form of what has been said. Grammar makes all the difference.

For example, consider Giussani's remark, "The truth of life lies in affirming being"—a remark that many might find unexceptional. It is not unlike the exchange between the young lady who declares to Bernard Shaw she has decided to accept life, in which Shaw replies, "You had better." Yet Giussani follows the claim that "the truth of life lies in affirming being" with the observation "affirming the existence of a beautiful chrysanthemum."

Just when your attention was directed to "being"—which might be taken to be an invitation to engage in metaphysical speculation--Giussani reminds us that being is but a name of the singular beauty of a chrysanthemum. Which I take it is his way of reminding us that you will get being wrong if you forget that when you are talking about being you are talking about chrysanthemums.

That Giussani calls attention to the chrysanthemum is by no means accidental given his account of charity. For Giussani charity is concentrated attention to the particular. "Concentrated attention" is, I believe, Giussani's way to indicate how charity requires the nonviolent apprehension of the other. To learn to love entails the ongoing discipline of being unselfed.

Giussani's focus on the particular is but a correlative of his insistence that the great enemy of charity is the abstract. (p. 92) From Giussani's perspective we are beings tempted to the abstract because we fear the concrete. We fear the concrete because the particular threatens, as it inevitably does, our desire to be in control. According to Giussani our penchant for abstraction is the expression of our willful attempt to live lives of distraction.

The alternative to our perverse willing he suggests is the development of tenderness. Tenderness is necessary if we are to have the patience required to love the chrysanthemum's fragile, beautiful impermanence. Indeed its beauty is its impermanence. To learn to love a chrysanthemum is to be on the way to learning to love ourselves and our fragile impermanence.

Giussani senses, I think, that the great enemy of love in our culture is sentimentality. Sentimentality is to see the existence of the particular as but an instant subject to my desires. The great enemy of love, therefore, turns out to be my assumption that all that exists exists for my benefit. Thus Giussani's suggestion that the affirmation of another simply because they are and not for the way we would like them to be, for me is the condition for the unselfing we rightly call love.

And learning to love requires forgiveness, for I am only able to discover who I am if I am able to be forgiven. To be forgiven is to acknowledge that my life is made possible by others. Indeed "my life" is a misleading phrase just to the extent it encourages me to assume that it is "my" life rather than the life I have been given. I think that is what Giussani means when he suggests that "the truest sacrifice is to recognize a presence." (p. 79)

This is why our ability to love begins with the recognition that our very existence is a gift of the love that moves the sun and the stars. We do not exist and then learn to accept a gift, but our very existence is a gift. A gift we must learn to accept without regret. We were created by love to be in love with our creator. So our ability to love begins, in the ontological sense, with our learning to love God.

That Giussani believes we must learn first and foremost to love God is crucial. For I fear too often the emphasis on love as the defining character of what it means to be a Christian in modern religious thought can and has ended up being a form of atheism. That is to say, the identification of Christianity with love has too often turned out to mean that it really does not matter whether God is love or that we are to learn to love God, but rather love names a generalized humanism that does not require God becoming one of us. A love, moreover, that is not determined by the love of God threatens to destroy others as well as ourselves.

That is why Giussani's contention "that the first object of man's charity is called Jesus Christ" (p. 22) is so crucial for the recovery of the love of God. Christ's question "Do you love me?" is a great gift. For if we have not learned to love this concrete particular, this "God made flesh for us," we will not love truthfully—and a love that is not truthful is accursed.

Yet "a truth about life must also bring with it life's wounds. You can't respond to life by imagining it without wounds when it is full of wounds." (p. 124) These are Giussani's words, but they describe the life and work of Jean Vanier. Vanier has taught us that we are only able to acknowledge our wounds by learning to love those whose wounds cannot be hidden. This lesson, both Vanier and Giussani argue, is the discovery that our lives are constituted by love.

I think I am right to link lives like Vanier and Giussani because they each represent the recovery represented by Vatican II of the Christological center of the faith. Giussani observes that Jesus died so that we might be saved from death by death. (p. 73) Because his theology is Christologically driven you cannot help but be attracted to the straightforward, no-nonsense character of Giussani's work. He tells us the truth even when we do not like it.

For example he says, "My God, how sad the majority of weddings are when I have to do them: the majority of weddings are a sadness without end because, except for a line that God sustains, they are false promises." (p. 77) He then suggests that the alternative is sacrifice; that is, to do what is true is a sacrifice needed. A sacrifice is needed if we are to be torn from falsehood.

By way of commentary on Giussani's remarks about marriage, I want to share with you a Giussani-inspired sermon I recently wrote for the marriage of one of my graduate students. I do so because I hope it exemplifies the kind of discourse Giussani's work makes possible. The text is I Corinthians 13.

Christians are required to love one another—even if they are married. That may be a cruel and even heartless demand, but it is nonetheless the way things are if you are a Christian. From Paul's perspective marriage is not necessarily the context that determines the character of love or our ability to love and be loved by another. Rather Paul seems to think we need to learn to be loved by God and so to love God, and then possibly ourselves, and if we have gotten that far we may even discover we can love our neighbor, who may be our enemy, which often turns out to be the necessary condition for those who are married to love one another.

But if that is true, why is I Corinthians 13 read so often at weddings? Is it because the people being married think I Corinthians 13 describes their love for one another? No doubt it is true that the characteristics of love described in I Corinthians 13 seem like good advice for making a marriage work. If your marriage is to be livable you will need to be patient, kind, free of jealousy and snobbishness, non-possessive, and, most of all, you cannot brood over past wrongs.

That seems like good advice. The problem, however, is that to turn I Corinthians 13 into advice for a successful marriage too easily underwrites the sentimentalities associated with romantic conceptions of marriage in our culture. Such a view of love assumes that we naturally know what love is and how to do it. But that does not

seem to be what Paul thinks. Paul thinks love is a gift; one that comes through the training of a whole church by the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly enough when Paul's descriptions of the character of love are abstracted from their ecclesial home and turned into general recommendations for those to be married, the result is a legalization of the gift of love. As a result love is transformed into a form of works righteousness. We assume it is up to us to give content to Paul's vague recommendations about the character of love and then we have to make what we have said love must be, work. So understood love is anything but good news. Even worse, the recommendations divorced from their theological home are not particularly helpful.

Think, for example, about Paul's claim that the love he commends does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in truth. A love that rejoices in truth is not an everyday affair precisely because the everyday tempts us to love half-truths. We never lie more readily, I suspect, than to those whom we love. For our loves are often constituted by misperceptions of one another that we later learn are just that, that is, misperceptions. Yet we fear an acknowledgement of the illusions constitutive of our loves because such an acknowledgement would prompt the recognition that they are not, nor are we, who we thought we were when we said, "I love you."

So thank God the love Paul commends is not meant first of all to describe the love between those about to be married. Rather, just as the beatitudes are exemplified by Jesus, so the love Paul commends names Jesus. Faith, hope, and love abide, but love never ends. Only Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is without a beginning and end. Thus Karl Barth's suggestion that we substitute the name Jesus every time I Corinthians 13 says love. "Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind, Jesus is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Jesus does not insist on his own way; he is not irritable or resentful, he does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Jesus bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things."

Paul's great hymn of and to love is, therefore, not first about us. Rather the love about which he speaks is that which characterizes God's very life. Thus Barth's remark: "to say 'God is' is to say 'God loves.'" We can say God loves because the Father would have the Holy Spirit rest on the Son so that we might participate in the very life of God. The love that is the Trinity was before we were, yet it is the same love that called us into existence. It is the love that assumed our flesh, even to be crucified by our sin, so that sin might be crucified by love. Love prevailed, overwhelming our sin, making possible our ability to love one another as Christ has loved us. Through love we have been made participants in God's very life.

It is good, therefore, we remember that Paul's hymn to love comes in the midst of his account of spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church is blessed by and torn apart by a variety of gifts. Some have the gift of healing, others the gift of miracles, another of prophecy, to others the gifts of discernment, and to others is given the gift of tongues, and still to others is given the gift to interpret what is said by those who have the gift of tongues. All are gifts of the same Spirit constituting a body that makes possible the recognition that we desperately need one another just as the eye needs the hand and the head needs the feet.

That we need one another may, moreover, be why I Corinthians 13 is rightly read so often at weddings. It is certainly rightly read at weddings if Benedict XVI is right about the character of love. In the first encyclical letter of his Papacy, *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI reminded us that to be a Christian is to be among those who have come to believe in God's love. According to Benedict, to be a Christian is not to believe in some lofty idea, but rather to encounter a person, to encounter Jesus, and thus to believe that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should have eternal life."

Benedict acknowledges that we do have a problem of language about love that leads to many misuses of the word. We speak of love of country, love between friends, love of work, love of parents and children, love of neighbor and of God. That love can be used to describe quite different relations according to Benedict makes it

hard to think that love might name a single reality. Yet Benedict says amid this multiplicity of meanings one particular love stands out: love between man and woman. The love between a man and a woman is crucial for our understanding of love, according to Benedict, because of its bodily character. That body, the Corinthian body, is the source of ecstasy, that through renunciation and purification, we are put on a path towards the Divine.

Love is an ecstasy, not in the sense of intoxication, but rather love names the journey from a self curved in on itself to the recognition of another. Such a love Benedict boldly suggests is a dim prefigurement of the mystery of the Cross. For God's love for us is an erotic self-giving revealed by his passionate love for the people of Israel, but most determinatively found in the embrace we call the Incarnation. The embrace of the very God and very Man has made it possible for us to share in the love that is Trinity. God is a bold bodily lover possessing our bodies so that we too might be love.

Benedict observes, therefore, we are rightly commanded to love one another. "Love can be 'commanded' because it has first been given." So we rightly command this couple to love one another. For today they are for us I Corinthians 13. Today they are for us the Gospel. The vows they make to one another, the exclusive love they promise to give to one another, is a love in time that binds time. Through such love they will lose their lives, but in the process they will be redeemed. What a happy thing, therefore, they do for us. For the promise they make to love one another makes us all more than we otherwise could be because through their love the body of Christ, the Church, is built up.

I pray that Fr. Giussani would like that sermon. Thank you very much.

Albacete: I most certainly can see, Professor, the influence of Fr. Giussani in your homily. You will recall that Fr. Giussani has a stunning paragraph concerning 1 Corinthians on page 22 of the book. It's very brief. I'll read it to you:

What is this morality by which even giving your body over to be burned in flames for an ideal is useless, and being an Einstein serves no purpose, and being a Gandhi serves no purpose? What is this charity without which we are nothing? It is that the first object of man's charity is called Jesus Christ. Man's first object of love and of being moved is called "God Made flesh for us," and because this Christ exists there is no longer any man who doesn't interest me.

Our next speaker is Fr. Julián Carrón. Fr. Carrón is President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. He was born in 1950 in Navaconcejo (Cáceres, Spain). He was ordained a priest in 1975, and the following year graduated in Theology from the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid, specializing in Holy Scripture. After teaching in Madrid and Jerusalem, and doing research in Washington, D.C., he headed the Minor Seminary in Madrid. In 1984 he obtained his doctorate in Theology from the Faculty of Theology of Northern Spain, in Burgos. He was lecturer and Professor at the San Dámaso Institute of Theology, Religious and Catechetical Sciences, in Madrid. He was a member of the editorial committee of the series "Studia Semitica Novi Testamenti," and Director of the San Justino Institute of Classical and Oriental Philology, in Madrid.

Besides authoring numerous papers in various journals, he published *El Mesías manifestado*, (*Studia Semitica Novi Testamenti* 2, Madrid 1993). He was Director of the Spanish edition of the international Catholic journal *Communio* and of the journal *Estudios Bíblicos*.

In September 2004 he moved to Milan, called by Fr. Luigi Giussani, founder of the ecclesial Movement Communion and Liberation, to share the responsibility of leading the entire movement. On May 13, 2005, the Pontifical Council for the Laity appointed him Ecclesiastic Assistant to the Association *Memores Domini*.

Since the 2004–2005 academic year, he has taught Introduction to Theology at the Catholic University “Sacro Cuore,” in Milan. In 2005 he participated, as a member appointed by the Holy Father, in the Synod of Bishops on the Holy Eucharist.

In April 2008 he was appointed by the Holy Father as Consultor of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and in October 2008 he took part in the Synod as Synodal Father appointed by the Holy Father. Fr. Carrón...

Carrón: This text is the third book of Fr. Giussani’s trilogy *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* which deals with the three theological virtues; faith, hope and charity. Once again Fr. Giussani introduces a dialogue on the nature of the Christian experience, as it emerges from within the dynamic of daily life. For him faith, hope and charity are not words to be superimposed from outside our human existence, but have to do with the structure of the I in its awareness of itself. These words carry with them the claim of answering the problem of life. This, in fact, is what is at stake above all today: whether life is worth living. In this book Fr. Giussani accompanies us in the rediscovery of the value of words that explain life. Man has long lost the original meaning of these words, and as a result, feels them as abstract or burdensome.

For this reason, in our time, words like “love” and “charity” cannot boast of a good reputation. Rather, impoverished notions of these words thrive. They prevail as either sentimentalism, loving and doing good for the sake of it, or moralism, loving and doing good for a sense of duty, according to the “moral imperative” of Kant. Behind the word “love” can be hidden a secret desire to impress. This raises the question; is loving dictated by a real interest in the person towards whom it is directed or by an ill-concealed egoism?

Pope Benedict XVI himself, in his first encyclical *Deus caritas est*, cautions against this risk of equivocation when one speaks of love and charity. He says, “Today, the term ‘love’ has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words”¹.

It is difficult to overcome this encumbrance if we are not willing to learn from experience. It is not uncommon to encounter people who doubt the existence of good, considering it to be motivated by one’s own interests, comfort, habits, etc. When, however, one experiences being loved gratuitously, as we all have, at least once in our lives, all these theories and interpretations crumble. If this occurs because of the disinterested gesture of another fellow human being, what will happen when we are faced with God’s charity towards us? It is for this reason that the Pope affirms that “God’s love is fundamental for our lives, and it raises important questions about who God is and who we are”².

Let us begin from the second of the two questions (who are we?), in order to understand the extent to which the love of God is fundamental for us. We cannot understand what charity is, if we do not become aware of our needy, wanting nature. This emerges in the relationship with all things: nothing satisfies us.

1. “What exactly is this lack a lack of?”

The Italian poet Mario Luzi could not more comprehensively and exhaustively delineate what constitutes our very nature.

“What is this lack a lack of,
o heart,
of which all of a sudden you are full?”

¹ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 2.

² Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 2.

of what?
 Once the dam is broken
 it floods and submerges you
 the inundation of your poverty...
 It comes,
 perhaps it comes,
 from beyond you
 a recall
 which you now do not listen to because you are in agony
 But it exists, fostered by strength and music
 the perpetual music will return.
 Be calm”³.

This is the greatness of man, this “inability to be satisfied by any worldly thing or so to speak, by the entire world. To consider the inestimable amplitude of space, the number of worlds, and their astonishing size, then to discover that all this is small and insignificant compared to the capacity of one’s own mind; to imagine the infinite number of worlds, the infinite universe, then to feel that our mind and aspirations might be even greater than such a universe; to accuse things always of being inadequate and meaningless; to suffer want, emptiness, and hence boredom - this seems to me the chief sign of the grandeur and nobility of human nature”⁴.

Experience shows that nothing tangible corresponds to the infinite nature of our desire. At the same time we cannot remove it, and it is inevitable that sooner or later we try to fill this emptiness by trying to possess people or things. This attempt cannot but be violent and pretentious. This would then be our fate: to sink into scepticism, abandoning the hope that there is something capable of matching the greatness of our desire.

But from the deepest depths of man a desirable hypothesis springs forth, “something unforeseen | is the only hope. But they tell me| that it is futile to say this to oneself”⁵.

Well: this unforeseen event has occurred.

2. “Christ draws me completely to Himself, such is His Beauty”

We are used to hearing about the charity of God. For this reason we find it difficult to identify with the novelty which Christianity introduced to the ancient world. A world characterized by what, in modern terms, is called “multiculturalism”: there was room for every culture in the Pantheon; there was no want of diverse cults.

So it is all the more surprising the way the novelty of Christianity was immediately grasped. Its prodigious and unstoppable diffusion is evidence of this. What did it have that was so new and attractive? In the ancient religions the Gods did not bother themselves much with the affairs of men. A constant in the ancient religions was a belief in the inability of the divine to love. Love was understood mainly as desire or eros. Therefore, accepting that the Gods had desires – eros - implied that something was lacking in them, and this was not in accordance with their divine nature.

It is in this context, that Christianity burst forth, revealing the nature of God and introducing a new meaning to the word “love,” that is charity, or in Greek, agape.

³ Mario Luzi, *Under Human Species*, Green Integer, 2010.

⁴ G. Leopardi, *Pensieri*, LXVIII., translated by W.S. Di Piero (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 113.

⁵ E. Montale, *Prima del viaggio*, vv.25-27

The first sign of this love is the gift of being and the heart of man – when it is simple and true - is capable of recognizing this love: “At this moment, if I am attentive, that is, if I am mature, then I cannot deny that the greatest and most profound evidence is that *I do not make myself*, I am not making myself. I do not give myself being, or the reality which I am. I am "given." This is the moment of maturity when I discover myself to be dependent upon something else. . . . *I am you-who-make-me... You-who-make-me* is . . . what religious tradition calls God- it is that which is more than I, more "I" than I myself. . . . For this reason, the Bible says of God: "tam pater nemo"⁶(Nobody is as much a father as God).

This simple recognition would be enough for man not to feel alone in front of reality. He could live with the awareness of being the child of a God who is so much a father. However, many times we forget this elementary evidence and live like orphans.

Man’s forgetfulness over the course of the centuries does not cause God’s nature to change. Rather, this separation is the opportunity for Him to reveal his true nature. A mother in the face of her stubborn child is forced to mobilize her maternal heart. Similarly, in the path of the human journey – God takes a step which renews and realizes the gratuitous nature of His being - He in Christ makes a gift of Himself.

Fr. Giussani writes, “When man least expected it – he couldn’t even dream about it, he no longer expected it, he no longer thought about Him [God] from whom he had received being – this ‘Him’ re-enters man’s life to save it, He gives Himself again, dying for man. He gives everything, a total gift of self: ‘There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’ A total gift.”⁷

However, Fr. Giussani does not stop at the objective fact of God’s great gift of himself, but adds that this gift of himself is “moved”: To explain what moved means Giussani quotes the words of the prophet Jeremiah which are fulfilled in Christ: “With eternal love I have loved you, for this I have attracted you to me, having pity on your nothingness.”⁸

“God’s charity for man is being moved, a gift of self that vibrates, agitates, moves, is fulfilled in emotion, moved in the reality of being: it is moved. It is God who is moved! “What is man that you should be mindful of him?” asks the psalm.”⁹

The whole of the New Testament affirms the absolute precedence of the love of God. In his letters, St. John expresses this in a definitive way; “This is love: not our love for God, but God’s love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away. My dear people, since God has loved us so much, we too should love one another.”¹⁰ And further on “We love then because he loved us first.”¹¹

This is the novelty the Pope reminded us of in his first encyclical: “The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism.”¹²

This moved love of God which was made evident in Christ, is the only form of love that corresponds to man’s wanting nature, to the deficiency in him. This is why man is so attracted to Christ. Jacopone da Todi articulated

⁶ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999, pp. 105-106.

⁷ L. Giussani, *Is it Possibile to Live this Way?* Vol . 3 *Charity*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, p.10.

⁸ Jer 31,3

⁹ L. Giussani, *Is it Possibile to Live this Way?* Vol . 3 *Charity*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, p.14.

¹⁰ 1Jn, 4, 10-11.

¹¹ 1Jn, 4, 19.

¹² Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 12.

this attraction. He says, “Christ draws me completely to Himself, such is His Beauty.” Beauty became flesh, and Christianity is precisely the surprise at the fascination provoked by Christ’s attractiveness. This is what struck those first two disciples, John and Andrew, who from the day they met Him became His. And now we can understand why they followed Him, because “charity (...) indicates the deepest content *and* (...) discovers the heart of that Presence that faith recognises.”¹³ This is what strikes those who belong to Him. Christianity would not exist if there were not this surprise, this surprise that no human error can impede.

For this reason, “the first object of man’s charity is called Jesus Christ. Man’s first object of love and of being moved is called ‘God made flesh for us’.”¹⁴ In fact, this endless love of God, as revealed in Christ, awakens all the affection of the person who welcomes it. “And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”¹⁵ The Christian personality is completely defined by this recognition. Christians are those who bear witness to this; “We have come to know the love God has for us and have believed in it.”¹⁶

“It is this affection for Christ, this continuous surprise caused by the “moved” gift of Himself that the Mystery brings to fruition in our lives, it is this affection and surprise that in time generates a subject capable of being interested in the destiny of every man. And this subject is interested in the destiny of every man not in an ideological or mechanical way, but as compassion and closeness, as a moved gift of himself which is a testimony to the original precedence of the Mystery.” (P Martinelli) “In fact if God had not become man, nobody would have been able to conduct their lives according to this gratuity. Nobody would have dared to look at their own life with this generosity.”¹⁷

Therefore we can understand well the beginning of the Pope’s recent encyclical, “Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity.”¹⁸ Why? Because “*everything has its origin in God’s love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it.* Love is God’s greatest gift to humanity, it is his promise and our hope.”¹⁹

It’s God’s infinite love for us, a love more fulfilling than any hypothesis of individualism that makes us capable of charity: “As the objects of God’s love, men and women become subjects of charity, they are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God’s charity and to weave networks of charity.”²⁰

From the abundance of charity, from the fullness of the love we are objects of, can spring gratuity. It cannot come from a lack but only from a surplus! “Because this Christ exists there is no longer any man who doesn’t interest me. If only you could read certain notes of Mother Teresa and her sisters, especially one I often read a few years back that relates how one of Mother Teresa’s sisters found a man who was dying in a sewer in broad daylight. She took him, brought him home, washed him and got him in order, and that man said: ‘I have lived like a wretch, now I’m dying like a king.’ But only a Christian can do this.”²¹

¹³ L. Giussani, *Is it Possible to Live this Way?* Vol . 3 *Charity*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, p.4

¹⁴ L. Giussani, *Is it Possible to Live this Way?* Vol . 3 *Charity*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, p.22

¹⁵ Gal.2,20

¹⁶ 1Jn, 4, 16.

¹⁷ L. Giussani, *L’io, il potere, le opere*, Marietti, Genova, 2000, p.132.

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 1.

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 2.

²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 5.

²¹ L. Giussani, *Is it Possible to Live this Way?* Vol . 3 *Charity*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, pp. 22-23.

Conclusion

“I have loved you with an everlasting love and I had pity on your nothingness.”²² This news, which comes to us from the history of the Jewish people is what moves me most. The Mystery, who made all things, has had pity on my nothingness, on our nothingness. Our Lady recognized this when she said “The Lord has looked on his servant in her lowliness.” God’s mercy towards us comes “before” any other consideration - so much so that it is not connected to our goodness. The preference of God is totally gratuitous. In fact, he takes us just as we are. This is why God’s preference is the starting point for every one of our initiatives towards others. It also indicates the method; gratuity.

If, in every one of our attempts to love and help others and in every gesture of what we call charity, we do not set out from here, sooner or later we tire. Things wear us out and in time we become oblivious to our needs and the needs of fellow human beings. It is for this reason that we are tempted to imprison ourselves in individualism, ultimately indifferent to everything and everybody, that is, alone. Remaining amazed by Christ’s pity on our nothingness, his lowering of Himself to the point of becoming one among us, is what overcomes every type of confusion. It is what overcomes every sense of powerlessness and fills us so that we can accept every sacrifice. We can thus even accept the humanly inconceivable sacrifice of giving one’s life so that another can live. This is exactly what Jesus did with each one of us and what a Christian mother would do for her child.

Thank you.

Albacete: This presentation, this reflection on charity is occurring at the time of a great tragedy of the people in Haiti. I think it would be irresponsible if we don’t say at least a word about that. It has already been said that in a certain sense the people there deserve what they got because they have made a pact with the devil.

On page 19-20 of the book, Fr. Giussani tells one of his favorite stories and it’s as follows:

Forty years ago when I was in Varigotti, a kitten fell from the second floor, flipped over a clothesline, and wound up crushed to a pulp on the ground; there, a few feet away, was the other kitten who was born with him. He remained there an instant staring at the other, then slowly walked away. This is the relationship between all human beings. It is only God who breaks through this estrangement and gives Himself to his creatures, bringing them out of nothing.

Watching the news on TV about the tragedy in Haiti, I thought of this story because I notice, and so did other people, the reporters, how many people stayed next to the body of the person that was their loved one, or friend, husband, wife, children. They stayed, they stayed next to them. They didn’t simple realize, well, there’s no more I can do; I better go help other people or save myself. Rather, they stayed next to not just the wounded, but the dead. They left only when the deceased were thrown into mass graves and then they had the desire to find where they may be.

I thought of this story of Fr. Giussani and I said, well, here are these men and women who are staying. What makes them stay? In a certain sense, the kitten who left has a certain logic to his position. What are you going to do? It’s obvious there’s no more hope, so you just go and at best try to help other people, save yourself, or whatever. But why stay? What is that force? What has this attraction? What is happening in the heart of these people? Is it a genetic thing? You know the now famous *religion gene*. Do we have a new one here, *the staying gene* that can be educated and moved in various directions? The Christian proposal that we have heard today, that this is the manifestation of the vocation to charity, of the human capacity for this mystery of charity that we have heard about tonight and that can be verified.

²² Jer 31,3

In the Holy Father's encyclical he says that charity is the guiding force behind, as Fr. Carrón just quoted, our view of what is human development, individual or social. Charity is the point of departure of the Church's social doctrine, the doctrine that encompasses all kinds of points—war and peace, health care, life, juridical issues. The social doctrine of the Church is an expression of the experience of charity as it enters such worlds.

So this is, I believe, the importance of this book. It goes beyond...certainly not a matter of spiritual inspiration, but an acute analysis, as the Professor said, of the world in which we live.

Finally, on page 17 you have the story of Fr. Giussani's experience in Nagoya, Japan, when he was discussing with Buddhists their religious experience of reality. The Buddhists emphasize the need for human beings to establish a harmony with everything, with concrete things, with the flowers, as the Professor mentioned. It's a beautiful thing, a beautiful vision. Fr. Giussani, in reply, embraces the nobility of this goal, the establishment of harmony. In fact, he was willing to include "the hairs on the head," remember? Each one as a subject of concern. But then came a stunning conclusion. For us, he said, this harmony has a face, has a nose, has ears, slept, cried, walked; it is Jesus, the harmony of the cosmos. It is this man, the experience and encounter with this man that is at the center of the social doctrine of the Church and of our response to the situation in Haiti and everywhere.

Thank you very much.