

**ADDRESS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
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“THE FORCES THAT MOVE HISTORY ARE
THE SAME THAT MAKE MAN HAPPY”
MEETING FOR FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES
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My dear friends,

I am very happy to be with you at this year’s Meeting. I thank Emilia Guarnieri, Sandro Ricci, and Marco Aluigi for their kind invitation. Although I am the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, I speak to you as a friend of the Movement, which I have known well since at least 1991. I come to you also as a pastor, having served the Holy See in various missions, beginning in New Zealand but extending to the different regions of the world, serving as nuncio in Haiti, Uganda, Mexico, and currently in the United States. In my various missions, I have discovered that no matter the country or nationality, no matter the wealth or poverty, many people are searching for happiness – for that which corresponds to the deepest longings of the human heart. They are on a quest to discover the forces that move history, for these are the same that make man happy.

As they search, tremendous changes are happening in the world – drastic changes in culture, technology, the movement of peoples, globalization, and rapid secularization. It has been said by Pope Francis that we live not so much in an epoch of change as in a change of epoch. These changes have made it difficult to hand on the faith to future generations. When faced with change, conflict, relativism, and bleak prospects for the future, people are beginning to despair under the burden of daily life and have forgotten how to be protagonists in history.

It is this that I wish to address today by first meditating on the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman at the Well (John 4:1-26), a passage which I believe can provide a structure for us to understand how the encounter reawakens the heart of the person to the possibilities for the future.

Then, I would like to show how Pope Francis is leading the Church and the world do the same in this time of epochal change, and finally, to see whether, we, as heirs to the great patrimony left to us by Father Giussani, can learn from his response to change and ideological challenges to truly rediscover what it means to be protagonists in our future and discover what moves history and makes us happy.

Part I: the Samaritan Woman at the Well: A Revolutionary Approach

Before I begin my reflections on the beautiful passage from Saint John’s Gospel, I place before you the words of Pope Benedict XVI at the beginning of his encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*:

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.¹

¹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005, 1.

The encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman at the Well is beautiful, simple, and profoundly human, and it helps me to understand my own vocation. I chose the words from it as my episcopal motto and thought of it immediately when I heard the theme of this year's Meeting: "The Forces that Move History are the same that make man happy." In this encounter, the Samaritan Woman has a spiritual and existential "block", but Jesus, through his merciful gaze and through dialogue, gradually opens her eyes and heart to recognize what will make her truly happy. The encounter with Jesus removes her shame and satisfies her thirst for joy, transforming her way of life. A horizon to a new way of living is opened. The encounter revealed everything that had been hidden deep within her – her own humanity. Strengthened and converted by her encounter and with a deeper affection for her own humanity, she could become a protagonist in her future, witnessing to others that she had found in Him the Messiah.

With the story of the Samaritan Woman at the Well, I want to describe the idea of conversion as an encounter with and recognition of the Other – that is of Christ, of the Presence of the God of Mercy. The Gospel of John is filled with life-changing "encounters". In the first chapter, John the Baptist points Jesus out as the Lamb of God, and his two disciples followed Jesus, who asks them, "What do you seek?" Already, the Savior is trying to awaken in them an awareness of their hearts' deepest desires.

In turn, the disciples asked Him, "Master, where do you stay?" He answered, "Come and See." They spent the whole day with Him and they remembered their first encounter; it was about four in the afternoon. Immediately, changed by the encounter, Andrew told his brother Simon, "We have found the Messiah." They had encountered the Presence- someone truly exceptional, who made them even leave John the Baptist – by the power of His voice, by His Presence, by the hope He offered.

In the second chapter, Jesus performs the miracle at Cana and the disciples saw His glory and came to believe in Him. The real encounter there is the encounter between God and humanity.

In the third chapter, Jesus encounters Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Jewish man, a scholar of the Law, a good Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, yet there was something missing from his life. Jesus' dialogue with Him would lead to his slow conversion. It was He who at least attempted to intervene that Jesus should be given a fair hearing and later appealed to Pilate for Jesus' body, seeing that it was buried properly. It was in the third chapter of John's Gospel, that the Lord told Nicodemus: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but shall have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world but to save the world through Him.*" Nicodemus would only gradually recognize the meaning of these words, but his initial encounter with Jesus was the event for revealing this truth to the whole world. It was the encounter that opened the door to hope. Everything else would follow.

But there are some obvious differences between Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus and his encounter in chapter 4 with the Samaritan Woman at the Well. Nicodemus came at night; she meets Jesus during the day. Nicodemus was prominent Jew, a member of the Sanhedrin; this woman was a Samaritan and was impoverished. Nicodemus was a moral person, who kept the Law; she was a sinner who had five husbands and was now with a sixth man. All this reveals something about Jesus: He is willing to meet with anyone – whenever and wherever. There is always the possibility of a life-changing encounter.

Jesus is journeying through Samaria. He is going to the “peripheries” as Pope Francis might say. God’s mercy is relentless. Jesus has journeyed from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north to Samaria just to meet this woman. When Jesus meets her, He is alone, and she is alone; the encounter is a personal one. They meet at Jacob’s well. In the mind of a Jew, the setting of the “well” would make someone think of marriage. Abraham’s servant met Rebecca at a well and led her to Isaac. Moses too met Zipporah at a well. Now, a woman encounters a Jewish man at a well at the sixth hour. It was as if Jesus desired an encounter – desired to engage this woman’s freedom. How things would go would depend on her freedom. She could simply walk away, like the rich young man had done, or she could become a protagonist in history, interested in her own humanity because of Jesus’ interest in her.

Certainly, the Samaritan woman did not intend to meet anyone. She was by herself? Where were the other women? Why weren’t they drawing water? They had already drawn their water early in the day. This woman came when she thought no one would be at the well. Why? Because she was a public sinner. She had to survive but she didn’t want to be seen, didn’t want to be judged, and did not want to give an explanation to anyone. She busied herself with activity but had forgotten her own dignity and what it was to be a protagonist in history. She allowed herself to be moved by forces that seemed beyond her control.

But her best plans to avoid an encounter failed. Jesus was there – waiting for her. He, a Jewish man, spoke to her, a Samaritan woman, in public. The love and mercy of God cross barriers and overcome boundaries. God doesn’t want distance; He wants to be close – even to sinners.

What is Jesus’ approach? He engages her in dialogue. In his humanity, he is tired and thirsty, but His real thirst is for her faith. He asks for a drink, and she refuses. At first, she doesn’t really want to talk to Him and points out the difference between them: Jew and Samaritan. Still, she gave Jesus an opening to continue the dialogue. Jesus responds to her rebuff by saying, *“If you knew who it was who was saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and He would have given you life-giving water.”*

Addressing him merely as *Sir*, she asks, *“Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?”* Jesus answers: *“Everyone who drinks from this well will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

At this moment, there is a recognition. The Samaritan woman recognizes that she is dealing with a truly exceptional person, someone willing to speak the Truth. We must think about how many times she came to that well to draw water! She continued to grow thirsty; nothing could satisfy her thirst. We must contemplate how many times she had to carry that jar to the well and how many times back she carried that jar, heavier on her return. No matter how much water she drew, it would never satisfy her deeper thirst –for happiness, for something or someone that corresponded to her heart’s deepest desire.

This burden was one that she didn’t want to carry any longer. She responded, *“Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”* She recognizes Him as the One who is able to satisfy her thirst for God. In reflecting on this passage, St. Augustine says that the jar represents her concupiscent desire. She has been trying to satisfy her thirst with the things of the earth and has found herself perpetually thirsty, unsatisfied, and frustrated. This was her life – one of pain, misery, loneliness, being used and rejected, and discarded.

It is not entirely unlike our lives. We too have our own jars. We try to cope with our sin, weaknesses, and inadequacies by filling our lives with things we think will satisfy us. For some people it is alcohol, drugs, and pornography; for others it is wealth, power, and the desire for human respect. We will take anything we can to help us feel better, but in the end, it doesn't satisfy. Just as when Jesus was approached by the disciples of John and asked, "What do you seek?" Jesus is now asking the woman to identify her real thirst. The six previous men were unable to satisfy her heart's real desire. Six is an imperfect number; seven, on the other hand, is a perfect, covenantal number. Jesus is the seventh man – the fulfillment of what was lacking in the previous six men and more. He has waited for her – to have this conversation.

But every conversation which we have with Jesus must be an honest one. We cannot really hide the truth from Him. Jesus knows her situation, but she has not yet told Him. Perhaps she feels ashamed. Jesus says, "*Go, call your husband.*" She answers, "*I have no husband,*" without telling the whole truth. We often do this. We say half-truths to hide our sins and shame, to avoid judgment or accepting responsibility for our actions. She tries to hide, but Jesus desires her faith. He will not let her conversion be partial. He says: "*You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have five husbands and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.*"

Rather than, out of a false compassion, ignoring the sin and its pain, Jesus exposes what she has done to the light of his truth – not to harm or humiliate but to heal. Now she stands before Him, knowing that He knows. We cannot hide our sins from God. He knows but wants to heal. Naturally, we get defensive when our weaknesses are exposed. We put up our defenses to deflect the "attack".

That's exactly what the Samaritan woman does, but something is happening. She now recognizes Jesus as a "prophet." Not yet ready to accept responsibility for her future, she tries to turn the attention away from her, pointing out the difference between Jews and Samaritans, the former worshiping in Jerusalem and the latter on this mountain. Jesus knows that this is a non-issue. True worship is to worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth. (cf. John 4:23-24). To really worship God is to embrace His Spirit or to allow ourselves to be embraced by his Spirit and to embrace His truth or to allow ourselves to be embraced by the Truth. Anything else is a cheap imitation. Everything else is superficial and won't permit true healing and fullness of life.

The water which Jesus has promised represents the Holy Spirit, the "gift" par excellence that Jesus came to bring on behalf of God the Father. Whoever is reborn by water and the Holy Spirit enters into a real relationship with God as a son or daughter.

Finally, she says, "*I know the Messiah is coming the One who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will show us all things.*" Led through dialogue, she expresses a desire for the Messiah, the fulfillment of her hopes and dreams – for the Truth who will set her free. She wants to be shown all things – of God's love and mercy. Jesus says, "*I who speak to you am He.*" There is a recognition. She has gone from calling him sir to calling him a prophet to acknowledging Him as the Messiah.

As the disciples return, the scriptures relate: "*So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?'*" She left her water jar. A miracle has happened – not just the forgiveness of sins or conversion, but the miracle of freedom. She chose to leave behind her old way of life and her old desires and to live in a new way.

Her encounter with an Original Presence led her to discover her own humanity and the possibilities for her future. She who once didn't want to meet anyone now desired to witness to Christ. This "living in a new way" meant telling others about her encounter.

This leads us to a series of questions: Why does her missionary impulse flow so "naturally" from her encounter with Jesus? Does the encounter with Him provoke us to be missionaries? What is missing if we are not missionaries? The Holy Father calls us to be a "Church that goes forth" – to be missionaries, but this does not mean merely telling others about Jesus; rather, to be a missionary means to be committed to a new way of living – to be a protagonist in our future. Isn't this really what pastoral conversion is about?

Eventually more Samaritans came to meet Jesus and no longer believed simply because of her testimony, but they heard for themselves and declared that He is "*indeed the Savior of the World.*" It is like Andrew saying to Simon, "*We have found the Messiah.*" The Samaritan Woman, through her witness, awakened in others the desire for happiness and for an encounter Him, who makes all things new.

Listen once again to Pope Benedict: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." Is this not exactly what happened with the Samaritan Woman at the Well? It was not a set of propositions or theological syllogisms or truth that brought about her conversion; it was an encounter with a person. Her encounter with Jesus helped her to see and discern what would truly satisfy and quench her thirst and what could never really satisfy her.

Her encounter helped her to leave behind her burden of sin to witness to Christ. In that sense, the Divine Mercy which she received as a gift was also a summons to evangelize – to create a better future in the history of the world. Her conversation with Jesus was not an easy conversation, but it was a life-changing one. Perhaps, at times, she would have recurrent remembrances of her previous husbands, but these would pale in comparison to the memory of this Event. It is not merely a historical remembrance of what happened on that day, it is a living memory - an ongoing awareness of His Presence – that changed her life and that opened a new horizon – a new way of seeing the world, a new way of living. The Samaritan Woman at the Well was transformed not only into an evangelist but into a witness to Christ and protagonist in history.

Part II: Pope Francis and the Change of Epoch – A New Revolution?

What Jesus did for the Samaritan Woman at the Well, I believe, is what Pope Francis is trying to do for each person he meets, for the Church, and our world – to facilitate a personal encounter with the One who corresponds to our hearts' deepest desires and helps us rediscover our own humanity and its potential.

When we consider the Holy Father's writings, like *Evangelii Gaudium* – the Joy of the Gospel, which, with good reason, is considered to be both programmatic and paradigmatic for the Pontificate of Pope Francis; *Amoris Laetitia* – the joy of love, which followed two synods on the family; *Gaudete et Exsultate* – on the universal call to holiness – and even the upcoming Synod on Youth, the Pope appears to be saying that it is possible for you – married or single, young and old, practicing or lapsed, rich or poor – to know Christ. You need to know Him if you are to be happy. For the Pope, the whole missionary endeavor begins with an encounter with Christ.

Evangelii Gaudium begins with these words:

“The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is born anew.”²

This encounter with Christ happens in and through the Church. There is an ecclesial dimension to the encounter. The Pope calls the whole Church to accept its responsibility for facilitating this personal experience of Jesus, who fills life with joy. Some years ago, then-Cardinal Bergoglio commented:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ bursts forth into our history, marked by its vulnerability, with an incomparable dynamism, full of strength and courage. That is the kerygma, the nucleus of our preaching: the proclamation about the bursting forth into our history of Jesus Christ, in His Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection.”³

The focus of the Church’s evangelizing mission must be on the kerygma: the announcement of a Person or an Event. Doctrine is certainly important, but it must impact reality. The Holy Father is sometimes criticized for not focusing on doctrine, but he is fully aware of the problems of life – not through textbooks – but through the reality of life. As a pastor in Argentina, he was always close to the people. He listened to and understood the reality of people’s circumstances, including situations of great poverty. Surveying the pastoral themes which he places before us, they are those that touch upon the family, youth, the poor, and the migrant – real people in real situations, with deep aspirations, not merely to have more but to be more and to be happy.

Why does the Pope keep re-directing our attention to these realities? We must recall that Francis is a Pope from Latin America. In a speech to the Fifth National Ecclesial Convention of the Italian Church, he said, “Today we are not living in an epoch of change so much as an epochal change.”⁴ The missionary mandate of the Church – to form new disciples and to evangelize – does not happen in a vacuum. Today’s ever-changing cultural context requires a new approach.

Prior to my appointment as nuncio in the United States, I had been posted in Mexico, arriving just at the time of the Aparecida Conference. The Latin American bishops had to confront this question of epochal change as they saw Catholics fall away from the Church or join sects. They noticed that in history there were certain principles or values which organized the life of persons, societies, and institutions. These were different for each era – the pre-Columbian period, the colonial period, the period of independence, and the modern period. At some point, some of the ‘unquestioned’ values of each epoch were challenged and replaced by other values. The modern period, marked by globalization and societal fragmentation, made evangelization difficult.

Similar changes in values are in European and American history. More recently, 1968 would serve as a watershed moment in the West. The modern period has been impacted by globalization, emerging new technologies and means of communication, the great movement or displacement of persons, and a loss of a Christian anthropology, resulting in a lack of identification

² Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 1.

³ Jorge Bergoglio, *El verdadero poder es el servicio*, Editorial Claretiana, Bs. As. 2007, 197.

⁴ Pope Francis, “Address at the Meeting with participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church,” Firenze, 10 November 2015.

with the Church and a sense of belonging. Today, this is what alienates people, who suffer from loneliness and insecurity.

Zygmunt Bauman wrote:

“The roots of insecurity are very deep. They are embedded in our way of living; they are marked by the weakness of bonds... by the crumbling of community, by the substitution of human solidarity with competition. The fear generated by this situation of insecurity ... is diffused throughout all the aspects of our life.”⁵

Father Giussani described modern man as marked by “doubt about existence, the fear of existence, the fragility of life, the inconsistency of himself, the terror of the impossibility; the horror of disproportion between himself and the ideal.”⁶

At Aparecida, the Latin American bishops perceived this insecurity and its effects on evangelization – the transmission of the faith from one person to another, from one generation to another. They stated bluntly:

“Our cultural traditions are no longer handed on from one generation to the next with the same ease as in the past. This even affects that deepest core of each culture, constituted by religious experience, which is now likewise difficult to hand on through education and the beauty of cultural expressions. It even reaches into the family itself, which, as a place of dialogue and intergenerational solidarity, had been one of the most important vehicles for handing on the faith.”⁷

As you know, the “author” of the Aparecida document was really the future-Pope Francis. To address the changes and insecurity effectively, the bishops adopted a method. What was the method? Listening to reality. Attention to reality reveals that in history, one thing that has been constant is change, which affects the conditions for the transmission of the faith. What are the real conditions of our people?

Pope Francis’ pastoral experience bore fruit at Aparecida, when collectively the bishops asked: Can we transmit the faith in the specific context of Latin America in a way that offers to the people the possibility of an encounter with Christ?

The bishops did not provide an immediate answer; rather, they listened and dialogued with married couples, families, young people, professionals and experts. Then, they analyzed carefully the conditions of the world today, examining those things that were an obstacle for people to pursue their deepest aspirations and that prevented them from asking true questions and receiving true answers in the political, social, economic and religious realms.

As pastors, they were forced to recognize their responsibility to educate young people to reality, so that they could become aware of their own humanity. In doing so, they would rediscover their aspiration to truth, justice, goodness, happiness, and beauty – the fundamental human experiences constitutive of the human heart. They knew this would come about only through an

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, “Alle radici dell’insicurezza,” intervista a cura di D. Casati, *Corriere della Sera*, 26 July 2016, p. 7.

⁶ Luigi Giussani, “Corresponsibilità,” *Litterae Communionis-CL*, n. 11, 1991.

⁷ V Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe, *Documento conclusivo*, CELAM, Aparecida 2007, n. 39.

encounter with Christ, who calls each person to follow Him – to be a disciple. A disciple whose life has been touched by the Lord cannot help but share what Christ has done for him, and so this disciple is transformed into a missionary who witnesses to Christ in the world. Thus, we speak of missionary disciples.

This was true not only for the faithful but even for the bishops themselves. They would have to evangelize in a changed context. The bishops would need to exercise their pastoral responsibility in the Latin American context – in a culture affected by secularization but open to the transcendent. It is a culture in which people stop daily to pray, to place their trust in God and to ask His help. Their prayer is not always formal, but people turn regularly to the God who became man and who accompanies them along their path in life. Italy too has many reminders in art, literature, and architecture of a culture imbued with faith in Christ. It is He who brings hope to the little ones of this earth, even when life is marked by poverty, marginalization, and rejection. These people learn to exist and carry on even amid a throwaway culture.

The Holy Father proposes a vision of a Church, following the approach of the bishops at Aparecida, that facilitates an encounter with Christ. He wants the Church to be a “place” of encounter with the God who became man. It seems to me that everything the Holy Father says and does points in that direction. The Pope draws our attention to reality by unceasingly speaking about the poor and migrants. He does not want them to escape from our sight, nor does he want us to neglect our responsibilities. The evangelizing mission of the Church demands an engagement with reality.

Pope Francis challenges and questions our way of thinking, living, and organizing our Church. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, he is quick to denounce injustice and to expose false and ephemeral solutions to problems. He wants the Church to help others overcome the fear of moving forward along the path of mercy. His desire is for a missionary Church that goes forth to the peripheries.

This mission first demands becoming aware of what exists in the heart of man: the sense of truth, justice, goodness, happiness, and beauty. The Holy Father proposes a missionary Church, sent to fill the thirst of man for the Presence of God in Jesus. He himself witnesses of this Presence and invites us to publicly witness to Christ. He pushes us beyond our comfort zone to be a sign and sacrament of salvation, responding to the cries and corresponding to the needs of the heart. He challenges us repeatedly, lest we become stagnant and self-referential.

During this epochal change. God’s love remains constant; nevertheless, greater communication of His love through evangelical witness is needed. God loves man and is responding (and, He is the response) to his deepest needs. This is what the Aparecida document and *Evangelii Gaudium* call pastoral conversion. Pope Francis calls us to move from a pastoral plan of self-preservation to one of intense missionary activity, capable of meeting the deepest needs of the human heart. His election – at this point in history – is truly providential, because with it, the Church received a Pastor who will push her to be a Church of encounter, of mercy, and witness, engaged in reality.

Just as the Lord has raised up a prophetic witness in Pope Francis during this “change of epoch”, which we are living in this moment, so too the Lord called Luigi Giussani to be both a prophet and witness, founding Communion and Liberation, and leading the movement through the tumultuous time of 1968. The exact same challenge of transmitting the faith in a period of profound social and cultural changes was confronted by Father Giussani. The history of the movement – your movement – involves the story of a man, who like the Pope, points you toward a deeper understanding of life and a more authentic search for meaning and happiness in your encounter with the Mystery.

Giussani was profoundly concerned about the happiness of his students, especially around 1968, the time of the sexual revolution. I invite you to read chapter 14 of *The Life of Luigi Giussani* by Alberto Savorano, but I want to cite one passage here:

“Giussani recalled that one day in 1969, he was strolling through the halls at Catholic, ‘where the revolution dominated, he bumped into ‘a guy from Varese, who enthusiastically announced: ‘If we don’t find the forces that make history, we are lost!’ Giussani commented, ‘I don’t want to get into the fundamental naiveté of this exclamation, and of every ideology that claims to be universal. I simply want to share the reaction I felt in my heart at hearing what he said: that the forces that move history are the same ones that make a person happy.’ ‘The force that makes history is a man who made his dwelling among us: Christ. The rediscovery of this prevents our destruction as human beings; the recognition of this introduces our life to the inflection of happiness, even if it is daunted and full of an inevitable reticence.’”⁸

Even prior to 1968, Giussani, while knowing that Christ was the answer, observed the disconnectedness between faith and life. While many of his students professed to be Catholic, recited the Creed, and knew their catechism, the faith as a “lived-experience” was not being transmitted; that is, when it came to making judgments and decisions about things that a young person viewed as truly *important* to his life, his ideals and hopes for happiness were shaped by a *secularized* mentality, in which Christ and His Church were largely absent. The decisions of young people were shaped less by Christ and more by the forces of the “modern era”, including the ideology of scientism, the exaltation of subjectivism, the reduction of faith to ethics or moralism, and an emphasis on emotional individualism. There was a gap between doctrine and the reality of life.

It became his fundamental task to educate young people and to lead them to see the attractiveness of Christ as the center of life and the fulfillment of their desires. He left his seminary teaching and began his educational apostolate which has flourished in your movement. Giussani’s method was to challenge the secularism that dominated the mentality of his students by inspiring them to conduct a rigorous examination of themselves, the fundamental experiences that characterize man’s life and aspirations, and the incapacity of modern secular culture to do justice to the deep mystery of the human heart. He wanted them to verify the proposal of Christianity with their experience and to see whether it corresponded to their desire for happiness

⁸ Alberto Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, Engl. Transl., Chicago: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016, 415-416.

He believed that this examination would lead to a rediscovery of man's "religious sense", the fundamentally religious character of the questions and desires inscribed on his heart. Man has been made for God. The person can only realize the truth of himself and find happiness by recognizing God and adhering to Him. Giussani sought to guide young people to appreciate in a deeper way the *fact* that God has made this adherence to Himself concretely possible, attractive, and beautiful by becoming man and perpetuating His incarnate presence in the world through His Church. This was a "new approach" and brought a freshness back to the faith of many, but then 1968 happened.

In a time of upheaval, many young people left the movement. Many were well-intentioned and desired to create a better world, but their approach was one of social activism, turning to ideologies and politics. There was, during the time of student protests, a genuine desire for authenticity in public life. Many felt the need to throw off the old order, filled with ambiguity and deceit and to replace it with something new. This led to a hostility toward the past. It became impossible to appeal to authority or to tradition as a starting point. The changes happened so quickly and left many bewildered. The way of confronting the world adopted by many young people was to return to the old methods which did not involve the personal encounter with Christ.

As things seemed to be slipping away, Giussani showed his true fatherly concern. He posed a simple question: What is that we want? He answered his question this way:

"What we want, giving all our time, energy, heart, and concern to the Movement, in whatever way, if we want Christ or if we're searching for ourselves, comes to surface during our trials. I keep insisting on this because, from secretarial functions or the simplest manual labor to the highest functions, this is really the point we must always keep in mind. If we don't keep it in mind, first of all, we won't manage to be the least bit contrite and, secondly, when we have difficulties, we'll decide ourselves whether this difficulty is sufficient to make us leave or if it's insufficient, and we continue to stay. Do you understand? We keep in our hands the ultimate criterion for deciding if what we do is right or not! If what we are after is Christ, or if it is our own self-love, the affirmation of ourselves, under any inflection, according to any point of view – this, comes to the surface in the exact moment of the trial and the difficulty, when we don't see clearly anymore, or when we no longer enjoy what we're doing. And that is the moment when the attraction of the world, and thus of the diabolical, of deceit, according to its attractive mask, sets itself before us and creates alternatives."⁹

A spiritual master like Ignatius of Loyola teaches us to discern and choose. Our choices will either lead to happiness and consolation or desolation and dissatisfaction. We need to confront reality and search for the forces that move history and that make people happy. What really attracts us and moves us?

To answer that, we must understand who we are as persons. The genius of Giussani lies in his religious anthropology, in his proposal of the "religious sense" as the foundation of the human person's awareness of himself and his engagement of life and reality. Giussani proposes that we observe ourselves in action and investigate the dispositions and expectations that shape

⁹ Luigi Giussani, "The Long March to Maturity, 27 February 1972, originally in *Litterae Communionis*, June 1972, pp. 3-4.

the way we approach life's circumstances. In this process, we discover that the "motor" that generates our activity and places us in front of things with a real interest in them is something within ourselves that is both reasonable and mysterious. Simply put, it is the search for happiness – a search carried with both the mind and heart. We have a need for happiness, but this also involves an experience of it.

Genuine human activity aims at happiness by being an enacted expression of fundamental questions. When acting, the heart of a person, full of desire for something, is searching for something that it does not yet possess and which it cannot give itself. The heart is drawn to the Mystery it seeks and becomes aware of this Presence. It is there and can be known. In other words, the anthropology proposed by Giussani is open to the Transcendent.

What are the fundamental needs sought by the heart but truth, justice, goodness, happiness, beauty? As a person pursues things that attract him, these needs become urgent, transforming desire into questions: "What will make me happy? What will correspond to my heart's desire?" The more seriously we take ourselves and our humanity, the more we realize that we cannot avoid these questions.

The anthropology proposed by Giussani in response to the crisis of 1968 is instructive; for just as there were difficulties of transmitting the faith then, so too now we are faced with new, more severe difficulties, because what was once self-evident is no longer so. In chapter 3 of *Disarming Beauty*, Father Carron speaks of the "collapse of the self-evident." There is a greater weakness of conscience that people have today. There is an ongoing reduction of the self, under the influence of power, that reduces our ability to look at reality. The current cultural context is different, because at least before, people saw the evidence or argument for something and either accepted or rejected it, but today, people no longer even see.

Earlier I said that people suffer from an existential uncertainty; their means of responding to this uncertainty have been found in efficiency-based social commitment, touched with moralism, and in busying themselves with activity, culture, and organization, but none of it brings relief or the newness of life offered by Christ, manifested in the new man. Modern man has lost touch with his own humanity, so despite his activity, the old man – the unsatisfied man – remains.

The need for the Church to take up her responsibility to *educate* could not be greater. Currently, in my mission in the United States, I find the American bishops having to constantly confront the phenomenon of the "nones", those who profess no religion. A lay theologian, Hosffman Ospino described the situation this way:

"In 1991 about 3 percent of the U.S. Population self-identified as non-religiously affiliated or "nones." Today, 26 years later, about 25 percent of all people in our country self-identify as such. The trend is very clear. We know that about 20 million people in our country who were born and raised Catholic do not self-identify as such anymore. It is likely that many of them, especially those who are young, joined the ranks of the nones."¹⁰

The Movement, I believe, needs to propose a path forward, applying the sensibility of the method of education proposed by Giussani, to our current reality so that men and women can

¹⁰ Hosffman Ospino, "Keynote Address," Convocation of Catholic Leaders, Orlando, July 2, 2017, in *Origins* 47/11 (July 20, 2017) 165.

become aware, not only of what their deepest needs are, but also of what they have within themselves. This rediscovery of our own humanity happens only through a living encounter- a living encounter with Christ that happens through the Church.

How does Christ reawaken humanity? He meets us, just as he met the Samaritan Woman. He places people before a human presence that is not reduced – in His Presence. The impact of our humanity running into His reawakens us to the importance of our needs. The problems faced by the person today do not immediately go away, but somehow, we face them differently, not always directly, but by examining in depth the subject who faces them. Christ came to reawaken the religious sense and our own humanity to face these problems.

In the context of epochal change, we, who need to announce the Gospel, cannot do so by neglecting the new forces that can influence new generations, who have their own expectations and aspirations. In other words, a main reason, it seems to me, that the difficulty in the intergenerational transmission of the faith exists is specifically rooted in the difficulty that we encounter in attentively ‘reading’ the epochal change in which we are living.

In the face of this existential fear and the collapse of the self-evident, one approach would simply be to build a wall around ourselves, but this would never rid people of their loneliness or interior fear. This would not actually help them to live in a new way or to experience the joy that comes with freedom offered by Christ and the Gospel.

The alternative to building walls is dialogue. In an interview, the late-Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran described what this dialogue might look like:

“The response is always and in any case a dialogue, an encounter ... the only possible road is that of an unarmed dialogue. Substantially, in my opinion, to dialogue means to go toward another unarmed, with a conception of truth that is not aggressive, and yet not disoriented.” “There is no other way?” the interviewer asked. “Absolutely not. We are condemned to a dialogue.”¹¹

At the heart of dialogue is the communication of one’s own personal life to others. It is a sharing of the existence of others in one’s existence. It is not always about proving oneself to be right. It is about a mutual sharing of persons that deals with how to live. As Christians, our dialogue should express the lived-Christian experience, not as a type of moralism, but as a grace which we have received from our initial encounter with Christ.

Conclusion: The True Revolution

We are at the threshold of epochal change. We speak of a technical revolution, a communications revolution with the internet and Smart Phones. Some still speak of Marxist and Socialist Revolutions; while, others believe in a return to Nationalism. We are even beginning to see, in the face of epochal change, groups of people embracing the curious so-called “Benedict option”, proposed by Rod Dreher, in the hopes of a cultural re-birth or revolution, or possibly signaling a retreat from change. But what is the true revolution?

The true revolution is the revolution of the heart. We cannot force anyone to believe, especially not young people. Jesus did not force the Samaritan Woman to believe; rather, he gave

¹¹ Jean-Louis Tauran, “Un altro passo verso l’abisso...”, intervista a cura di Paolo Rodari, *La Repubblica*, 27 July 2016, p. 8.

her, through dialogue, a chance to pursue her heart's real desire. We too can offer those we meet, especially the young, the opportunity to share in the grace that we have received and invite them once more to belong to Christ and the Church. We communicate this grace through the witness of our life. The world today needs witnesses: parents, educators, politicians, our co-workers and clergy. We need a Church that witnesses to the joy of belonging to Christ. Christ was that Person and is that Person who is so attractive that he helps us connect with our own humanity.

It is for this reason that the Holy Father, like Giussani, wants a Church that is close to the people, a Church that is not self-referential but that goes forth with the joy of the Gospel. He calls us to be a Church that witnesses to a joy and hope born from the encounter with Jesus.

I believe this is also why Pope Francis has said that mercy cannot be a parenthesis in the life of the Church. Sin and the alienation it brings serve as obstacles to receiving the grace that God wishes to give us and to sharing in the experiences of the other. It fills the heart of man with that which will never satisfy him. Mercy is the remedy, the healing balm of the Divine Physician.

In the encounter with Christ, mediated through the Church, which shows forth the face of the Merciful Father, a person can re-examine his or her real expectations for life and the future; can have the possibility of a life-changing encounter – with one's mother, an educator, the Church, or even a foreigner – in which one feels valued and begins to rediscover the potential that lies within, which in turn helps the person find happiness. Without the encounter and the embrace of our humanity, which reawakens the religious sense in us, protagonists will not be generated, and history will not be moved.

Twenty years ago, Father Giussani told us:

“The mystery of mercy shatters any image of complacency or despair; even the feeling of forgiveness lies within the mystery of Christ.

This is the ultimate embrace of the Mystery against which man ... cannot oppose anything, can make no objection. He can abandon it, but in doing so he abandons himself and his own good. The Mystery as mercy remains the last word even on all the awful possibilities of history.

For this reason, existence expresses itself, as the ultimate ideal, in *begging*. The real protagonist in history is the beggar: Christ who begs for man's heart, and man's heart that begs for Christ.”¹²

In 1968, as a true spiritual father, Giussani warned his children not to embrace the false revolutions and its ideals, whether those of the socialist/Marxist/atheistic variety or those of the sexual revolution. He saw the social activism of the period as a revolution of sorts – a new type of Pelagianism that could never bring life, salvation, or the kingdom in its fullness. He knew that the true revolution was a change of heart.

In this regard, the Holy Father and Giussani converge, with the Holy Father speaking of a “revolution of mercy” or tenderness. Both Giussani and Pope Francis want people to be free from the wounds of sin and its consequences so that they may assume responsibility for their future,

¹² L. Giussani, “In Simplicity of My Heart, I have gladly given you everything,” testimony during the meeting with Pope John Paul II with the ecclesial communities and new communities, 30 May 1998, in L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), xii.

verifying the truth of the Faith by a well-formed, educated conscience – a conscience that is informed by Scripture, Tradition, the authority of the Magisterium, and experience, an experience that engages reality. Rather than be tossed about on the waves of the dictatorship of relativism, a renewed humanity has the potential to journey forward through the storms of change to the peaceful harbor.

If we are willing to encounter Christ anew, just as the Samaritan Woman at the Well was, then we no longer need be moved by power or sin or poverty, but we can be healed by Mercy and pursue that which will satisfy our thirst for a new way of living and engaging reality. No longer defined by the powers of this world or by ideologies, in freedom we can pursue beauty, truth, and goodness, found above all in the Infinite, who satisfies the longings for the heart and who can make us happy.

A humanity reawakened by Christ can generate new protagonists in the history of the world – new witnesses able to make judgments, able to discern right from wrong, good from evil, true good from passing pleasure. A reawakened humanity has an ability to see – not only with the eye but also with the heart – and can verify the truth of the faith and propose it in this time of epochal change. A joyful Christian witness shows forth the attractiveness of Christ that makes others say, “What makes that person tick? What moves that person to act?”

We know that for us it is Christ. As Father Giussani says: “The force that makes history is a man who made his dwelling among us: Christ. The rediscovery of this prevents our destruction as human beings; the recognition of this introduces our life to the inflection of happiness, even if it is daunting and full of an inevitable reticence.”¹³

Meeting Christ and being changed by Him – the revolution of the heart – this is what turns the wheel of history! This is the true revolution!

This is Giussani’s legacy, his gift to the Church, which lives on in you. Therefore, I am grateful to God for him, for Pope Francis, and to all of you who carry on in this movement, this way of living the faith as protagonists in the history of the world. I am especially grateful to the many parents who make every effort to educate their children in the way that helps them discover happiness.

I conclude with a video of my niece with her two daughters. She tells them that she is expecting another baby. Note the smile on the younger one at the news. The older of the two girls, wanting to verify this, asks: “Is it really true?” she asks. Her father asks: “Are you happy?” She nods her head to say “Yes.” Upon verification of the “fact”, the older asks, “Can we take good care of him?” She accepts the responsibility of caring for another and so becomes a protagonist – a force for a better future – a happy one for her new sibling. The younger girl also needs to verify, asking “Where is the baby?” She wants to see. She touches her mother’s belly and says, “It’s not there.” Her search and ours continues!

¹³ Alberto Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, Engl. Transl., Chicago: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016, 416.