

The September 22, 2014 issue of Italian daily newspaper *"la Repubblica"* published extracts from "The one resource is the Christian sense of the 'I'", Fr. Julián Carrón's preface to **In cammino (1992-1998)**, by Fr. Giussani, just published by BUR, Milan, 2014, 396 pages, €12.00.

The battle between the "I" and the powers that be, according to Fr. Giussani

Neglecting the human person is the supreme obstacle to salvation. A lesson from the founder of Communion and Liberation.

Julián Carrón

"The supreme obstacle to our journey as women and men is "neglect" of the "I." Thus the first point of a human journey is interest for your own "I," for your own person. This interest might seem obvious, but this is not the case at all: just look at our daily behaviour to see what immense gashes of emptiness of consciousness and of lostness of memory characterize it." Fr. Giussani is unpredictable. Who of us would have said that the supreme obstacle to our journey as women and men is neglect of the "I"? We think all the rest is more important than this. Precisely this opinion shows just how much the perception of our "I" has been obscured in us. Fr. Giussani said this in 1992, identifying in this clouded perception the sign of a "barbaric age" that was advancing (today we can recognize with more evidence just how right he was): "Behind the increasingly fragile mask of the word 'I,' today there is *great confusion*." The consequence is before the eyes of all: "No inhumanity is greater than that of making the 'I' disappear: precisely this is the inhumanity of our times."

In this situation all might seem lost, but Fr. Giussani's gaze is different. He manages to see in the "I" a bud that the others do not see. In fact, he helps us recognize that even in this context, the "I" continues to nourish an "expectation of salvation," no matter how confused. "As Adorno says; the human person expects from the truth of things, however that truth is conceived, that notwithstanding everything, within appearances there will also emerge the image of salvation. The expectancy of salvation is inevitable."

Where can this salvation come from? With great realism about the boundless nature of our need, Fr. Giussani invites us to recognize that "this salvation cannot come from us, cannot be invented by us, neither by individuals" nor by everyone together. Where can it come from, then? "*Only an event* can make the 'I' clear and substantial in its constitutive factors. This is a paradox that no philosopher and no theory—sociological or political—can tolerate: that an event, not an analysis, not a recording of sentiments, is the catalyst that enables the factors of our 'I' to come to the surface with clarity and to arrange themselves before our eyes, before our consciousness, with firm, lasting, and stable clearness."

"Let's imagine Andrew and John, two fishermen used to hard work, not prone to excessive flights of imagination. Let's imagine them as they go with Him, first while they follow Him mutely and then when they go with Him to all the way to His house: looking at Him they felt themselves; they were no longer themselves, no longer

what they were the evening before, no longer what they were when they started out from home that morning. If someone had taken them two days before and said, 'John and Andrew, think about your I, think about your person,' they would have said, 'Well, let's hope we catch a lot of fish tonight. Let's hope that my wife gets better. Let's hope that the children will grow up well,' but they never would have thought about what they felt; seeing that man, they felt themselves."

As we see, the event has the form of a human encounter within everyone's reach. The encounter is what re-awakens the "I" from its state of neglect. This is why Fr. Giussani says, "The encounter re-awakens the personality, makes perceive, perceive anew, discover the sense of its own dignity. Since the human personality is composed of intelligence and of affectivity or freedom, in that encounter the intelligence is awakened to a new curiosity, a new will for truth, a new desire for sincerity, a desire to know how reality truly is, and the 'I' begins to tremble with an affection for existence, life, oneself, and others that it did not have before."

But there is a catch, Fr. Giussani would say. This event, so full of consequences, must be acknowledged. "There must be an 'I' that embraces it." What drives the human person to embrace it? The heart, the most neglected and yet the most crucial thing for making a human journey: "Without the heart, if you do not have the heart, if you do not conserve the heart that was given to you, without the heart, God can do nothing."

Why this insistence on the "I"? Because being ourselves is the one resource for opposing the dominance of the powers that be. In the face of the attempt to shift attention to the action of the "I" in society, Fr. Giussani corrects us: "The one resource that remains for us is a powerful renewal of the Christian sense of the 'I.' I say the 'Christian' sense not out of preconception, but because only Christ's conception of the human person, of the 'I,' explains all the factors that we feel erupting within ourselves, emerging in us, so no power will be able to crush the 'I' as such, to keep the 'I' from being 'I.'" What makes the "I" begin again when it gets lost? Here is Fr. Giussani's answer: "Only the companionship among us can support the effort, the risk, and the courage of the individual. But there cannot be a companionship entirely devoted to supporting the revival of the individual; it cannot be found among women and men, among people alone. The presence of an Other is needed, a person who is more than a person: God came to this world to bring together this solidarity that strengthens and enables continual resumption of the journey to the truth and the good through a common work together."

Therefore, the Christian community is defined by the "memory" of that fact. This is no protective fence, no lightning rod or refuge from the storms of life. On the contrary, "being in companionship means not letting yourself stop in the face of any negativity, any negation, or any sacrifice, any toil; striving for and desiring that which is greater, truer, becomes more important than anything else."

(This text is an extract from the preface to In cammino (On the Journey), by Luigi Giussani)