

**Letter from Cardinal Opilio Rossi**  
accompanying the Decree of Recognition of the Fraternity

Vatican, 11 February 1982

Reverend Father Giussani,

*After careful and extended study of your application presented to the Pontifical Council for the Laity on 7 April 1981, in my position as president of this Department, I have the pleasure today of sending you here enclosed the Decree of Pontifical Recognition of the "Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione." In fact, having reviewed the principles, aims, and organization of the Association as described in the Statutes you presented, where we see that the opportune amendments suggested have been adopted; taking into particular consideration the support manifested in numerous letters from Cardinals and Bishops; being aware of the spiritual and apostolic fertility demonstrated in the numerous and varied works that the Association promotes, supports, and creates; the Pontifical Council for the Laity has recognized that the "Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione" fulfills the requirements for obtaining this recognition.*

*This approval clearly has as a consequence the commitment to ever greater loyalty, responsibility, and dedication to the Church. This Department thus considers it opportune to indicate to you the following pastoral recommendations which it does not doubt will be kept carefully in mind in the reflections and actions of the Association.*

- 1. Of primary importance and pastoral urgency is the contribution that the Fraternity can bring to the Church by working together for the growth of a Christian, communal, and evangelizing sensibility and experience in the spheres-often secularized and "distant"-of the creation and dissemination of culture and the edification of society. A missionary presence in these spheres is seen to be more necessary than ever for bearing witness to Christ, as the Church, where the basic principles of human life and social interaction are at stake.*
- 2. In times when it is felt that young people are searching in various ways for profound reasons and experiences that can give meaning to their personal and social life; in times when the Holy Father and the Bishops show a particular preference for the evangelization of youth, the Fraternity should intensify its commitment to being a propitious place of encounter and exchange of witness to the Christian life for the spiritual growth of the young people who approach it.*
- 3. The consistent and enthusiastic affirmation of its "charism" and the profound "affectio societatis" resulting from it are undoubtedly fundamental premises for the creative and fertile development of every association. This affirmation is for the association a gift of God. In this way the association puts down the deepest roots of its identity and originality. Experience has not shown in vain that the times of crisis and confusion of identity and goals of an association are manifested in the weakness and sterility of its projects and contributions. At the other extreme-in the case of a euphoric and uncontrolled exaltation of its identity and contribution-there is the risk of temptations arising within the organization toward an aggressive self-sufficiency. It is certainly important-and this must be the object of permanent revision guided by faith-to maintain a fertile balance between an associative "identity" and a meek "opening" to what the Spirit of God calls forth in human hearts, and especially in their multiform and diverse presence in the life of the Church. The fundamental horizon-which is certainly that of the Fraternity-must be of profound gratitude and meekness in face of the grace received through the Church and of total dedication to this gift for the good of all the Church as a sacrament of salvation for mankind. We know that we always "receive" much more than we "give." In this spirit of truth, communion, humility, the Fraternity will always be committed to making its "charism" bear fruit in the Church, with the Church, and for the Church.*
- 4. When the ecclesiastical nature of an association has been recognized, it is clear that it must live in complete availability and communion with the Bishops, headed by the Supreme Pastor of the Church. It is particularly important, as the Statutes of the Association emphasize, that the Fraternity place itself at the service of the Bishop of each diocese and collaborate within the sphere of the pastoral work of the Church at a local level. In this context, I would like to recall the words of the bishop and martyr Ignatius of Antioch († c. 110), who in a letter to the community of Smyrna stated: "All of you must obey the Bishop as Jesus Christ obeyed the Father." There can be no doubt that*

*here we have a fundamental theological principle of the Church. No spirit of division can arise from the Gospel. The Spirit of God is granted above all to those who come together to pray, as is often affirmed in the Acts of the Apostles with regard to the early Church. With its particular "charism" and teaching methods as a starting point, the Association will thus offer its experience and programs, integrating with and developing within the pastoral life of the diocese under the guidance of the Bishop. At the same time and in the same spirit it will participate in parish life, in a way that its presence in the "territorial" sphere of Church life and its presence in the different "functional" spheres be the stimulus to a balanced enrichment and complementarity.*

- 5. The fundamental mission, also of the priests associated with the movement, is that of being "at the service of Unity." For this service they have been ordained and sent out by their Bishops for the care of souls. They achieve this service every time that they fulfill their highest mission: that of presiding over the celebration of the Eucharist. They must therefore never neglect this service, nor take into consideration only the interests of their movement. Rather, they must be open to every charism that might manifest itself among believers, offering their complete availability and care.*
- 6. It is true that the vitality of a movement depends also on the number of people making it up. And "Communion and Liberation," in the number of its members, represents a great strength for the Church. Precisely in situations like this, one must ensure that faith maintain all its strength of radiation onto life, and that seeking to fulfill the will of God and proclaiming his kingdom remain the Association's principal goal. It is true that effectiveness in society depends on the sizable number of its members; but it is also true that the spiritual effectiveness and the announcement of the Gospel depend on the spiritual activity and pursuit of a deeper faith on the part of the individual and of the group, through a life of prayer and encounter with Jesus Christ himself, through his Word, through the sacraments, especially those of penitence and the Eucharist.*
- 7. When the Fraternity operates in various dioceses in a country and on a national level, it is of primary importance that its programs be worked out and its actions inserted into the framework of the pastoral orientations of the Bishops' Conferences, offering its collaboration and contribution whenever necessary and opportune.*
- 8. Communion and participation in the life of the Church demand a spiritual and practical openness to dialogue, collaboration and if need be to coordination with many other Church associations and movements, firm in the conviction that this is an mutually enriching exchange of gifts and a positive factor for the Church and its mission.*
- 9. The "Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione," present mainly in Italy, nonetheless already counts local experiences in various countries. Its "catholic" and "missionary" vocation calls it to a progressive extension toward new secular and ecclesiastical realities. It will thus find a flexible way to adapt its identity and contribution to the very different expectations and challenges experienced in the manifold contexts of the Church in which it finds itself. For its part, this Department remains particularly interested in maintaining periodic and regular contact with the Fraternity, for the exchange of experiences and programs of common interest, for the evaluation of the development of the Fraternity as an association and of possibilities of collaboration within the sphere of the participation of laypersons-and their movements and associations-in the life and mission of the Church.*

*Opilio Card. Rossi President*

*Paul Josef Cordes Vice-president*

Decree of Recognition The "FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE" originated in 1954, when the priest Father Luigi Giussani, with the aim of promoting communion as a fundamental necessity of life through a proposal of faith, began his apostolate of working with students, workers, and in general in the spheres particularly connected with collective life.

As a result of successive experiences, gradually brought to maturation and extended into different sectors of the associative life, the need was felt to educate to a more intense spiritual life, groups of responsible adults to whom could be entrusted the missionary apostolate in various fields of apostolic work, wherever the need was felt, who would place at the Bishops' disposal their energy and dynamic pastoral service.

As events rapidly evolved in most recent years and needs quickly changed also in the various sectors of the Church's apostolate, the idea also developed of a greater community collaboration, so that these adult groups came together in a lay association called the "FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE," obtaining at the same time recognition as a juridical entity as described in canon 100 and canon 684, 685, and following of the C.J.C., with a decree dated 11 July 1980, signed by the Abbot Ordinary of Montecassino Msgr. Martino Matronola, and under the auspices of the Patriarch St. Benedict, whose spirituality served as a guide to the above mentioned adult groups from the earliest period of their apostolic and missionary education.

The goal of the Association is to promote, as established in the Statutes, communion as a fundamental necessity of life, tending to express itself in a communal participation in the spirit of the Gospel, in ecclesiastical communion, keeping in mind that the dissemination of the Christian fact is generally conditioned by the presence of a community.

In particular the Association proposes, along with a more intense spiritual training for its members, proclamation and catechism at a capillary level, frequent celebration of the Sacraments, work in the fields of culture and the means of social communication, as an occasion for deepening and expressing their faith and as gratuitous service to others; and a commitment to missionary work as the meaning of the catholicity of the Church and as a vocational choice, in all the spheres mentioned in article 3 of the Statute.

Membership in the association can be requested by anyone who, as established by the Statutes, without distinction of sex or social condition, makes a written commitment to promote its goals, with a greater daily commitment to a life of communion as the most valid means of apostolate and a greater dedication to the service of the Fraternity, as compatible with the duties of each individual situation.

The members of the "FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE" practice profitably their apostolate not only in many regions of Italy but also in other nations in Europe and on other continents, fostering exchange, communication, and dialogue and exercising a steady missionary presence in various sectors of cultural and charitable apostolate and social activity.

As the members of the "FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE" wish to live their Statutes in a spirit of closer union with the Church and to participate more intimately in the mission of the Hierarchy in adherence to the doctrinal teaching of the Pontifical Magisterium and to collaborate in all the initiatives instituted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, from which depend the associations of the faithful and the various ecclesiastical movements, the President of the Association, Rev. Luigi Giussani, has made application to this Department with the intention of obtaining pontifical recognition of the "FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE."

The Pontifical Council for the Laity has not failed to examine, using the criteria of the Departments of the Roman Curia, the documentation transmitted to it, after having heard the vote of various consultants and experts and the opinion of qualified persons. Having received also testimonial letters from Very Eminent Cardinals, members of the Sacro Collegio and Residentials, from numerous bishops in Italy and other European nations and on other continents, urging pontifical recognition of the "FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE," this Pontifical Council for the Laity, after having established that the Statute, corrected and revised according to the suggestions given, corresponds with the aims of the Institution, and having verified the clear and evident utility for the good of souls of the individual and community missionary apostolate that the members of the Fraternity propose to put into effect, ESTABLISHES AND CONFIRMS AS A JURIDICAL ENTITY FOR THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH THE LAY

ASSOCIATION CALLED "FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE," declaring it to all effects an Association under Pontifical Law and decreeing that it be recognized as such by all.

Any changes in the Statute that might be rendered necessary in the future by current canon law must be submitted for approval to the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

The Holy Father John Paul II, informed of the progress of the Association's application, in the audience granted to the below signed on 16 January 1982, was benevolently pleased to encourage the Pontifical Council for the Laity to proceed toward approval.

We thus express our vivid hope that under the protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and of the Patriarch Saint Benedict, Patron Saint of Europe and of the "FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE," the individual members and all the Fraternity together will give their clear witness to faith, as examples of piety and virtue that can always and everywhere act as the working ferment of an apostolate for the good of mankind.

Rome, 11 February 1982

Opilio Card. Rossi President

Paul Josef Cordes Vice-president