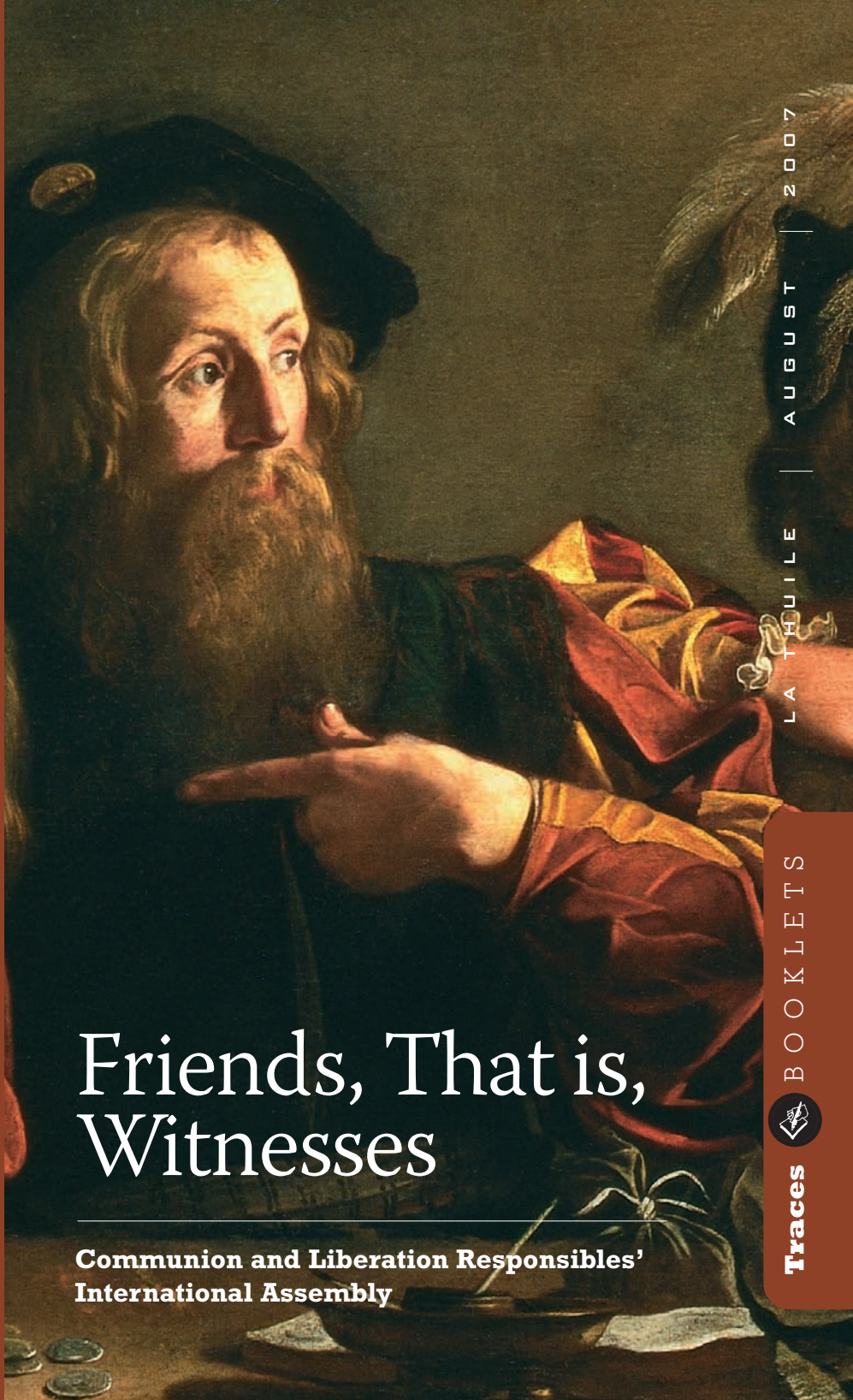

Friends, That is, Witnesses

Communion and Liberation Responsibles' International Assembly

LA THUILE | AUGUST | 2007

Traces BOOKLETS

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Communion and Liberation Responsibles' International Assembly

La Thuile, Italy, August 25-29, 2007

Traces BOOKLETS

Cover:
Caravaggio, *The Call of St. Matthew* (detail), 1599-1602.
The Church of San Luigi dei Francesi, Roma. © Foto: Archivio Scala, Florence.

This year, at the International Responsibles' Assembly we tried to verify the work that each of us had begun on the contents of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, "Christ, in His beauty, Draws Me to Him."

Right from the first assembly a difficulty in recognizing the Mystery at work in reality, in experiencing a familiarity with Him in day-to-day circumstances clearly emerged. We cannot tackle this difficulty alone, as is clear to everyone if we look at our own personal experience. So–we said–only if the Mystery becomes more powerfully present can it become familiar to us.

*Out of pity for each one of us, the Mystery, at a certain point, entered into history, becoming a factor of reality, not in order to spare us the drama of life, but in order to help us in our human adventure. Fr. Giussani reminds us of this: "God, from whom all things come, would remain vague and would not determine life if He Himself had not come into life as a factor of it, a determining factor that gives it meaning, density and value" (*Alla ricerca del volto umano *[*In Search of the Human Face*], p. 25).*

Only His historical presence, which is contemporary with us in Christ's continuity in the Church, can give us an education capable of introducing us to reality as a whole, to the point of recognizing the Mystery present in it. In other words, if the Mystery is to become familiar to us, we need people who constantly correct us, and help us keep moving when we stop short at appearances, who put us back on track when we go astray.

We need witnesses, that is, friends who recognize the Mystery present and help us to recognize Him, without taking our place in our relationship with the Mystery. Friends, that is, witnesses who do not spare us the journey of our reason and of our freedom.

This booklet can be helpful for seeing the kind of work on the content of the Exercises that awaits us of the Fraternity. We offer it to everyone as an example of this commitment necessary for living, without which Christ can remain inexorably far from our heart, like a "word" that never happens in our life. This is why we are friends.

Julián Carrón

Saturday evening
August 25, 2007

INTRODUCTION

Julián Carrón

"Christ, in His beauty, draws me to Him."[1] But for Christ to draw me totally toward Him I must not reduce Christ. In order for Him to draw me wholly towards Him, it takes all the impressiveness of His Beauty, of His attractiveness. In one of the recent texts published in *Traces*, Fr. Giussani said, "To invoke the Spirit means only one thing–that the Spirit make us understand, comprehend the measure of Christ, that is to say, the structure of the fact of Christ, and that's all."[2] We very often experience the reduction of Christ to our measure. The more we are aware of this, the more urgently we need to cry out to the Spirit, in order that this Spirit make Christ penetrate into us and make the whole of His truth shine out before our eyes. The more we feel this need of ours, the more consciously we can cry out and sing *Come Holy Spirit*.

"Even the hairs on your head are all numbered."[3] We must stop before Someone who looks at us like this, Someone who looks like this at our nothingness, down to the very detail of our hair. Only if we let this look penetrate into us, only if we become one with Someone who looks at us like this, can we truly discover to what extent there is Someone who has this passion for our life.

Each of us may have arrived here with his own problems, his own worries, his own uneasiness; but what is the first initiative of the Mystery in this instant, the initiative that none of our worries can stop, that none of our uneasiness can prevent? You arrive

here and you bump into a presence that tells you, "Even the hairs on your head are all numbered." No worry of mine can prevent this, can prevent the Mystery taking this initiative, "before" anything else. This "before" is what defines everything. "He loved us first,"[4] St. John said. And St. Paul recalls in his letter to the Ephesians, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens. He chose us in Him before the creation of the world."[5]

At the beginning of this time together, let us look at this "before," let us allow this "before" to enter us, before anything else. It is a precedence given to this "first," before everything else. St. Paul ends his hymn, in which he makes his hearers aware of this choice, aware of this election of which they are the object, with a wish, that is the same wish I have for each of you: that the Lord give you a deep knowledge of this plan, of this look, of this passion that Christ has for each of you, that He "open the eyes of your mind to make you understand the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe, according to the working of His great might."[6]

It is an absolute precedence. St. Augustine writes, "The love with which God loves is incomprehensible [it is so mysterious that it is incomprehensible] and not subject to change. He did not begin to love us only when we were reconciled to Him by the blood of His Son, but He loved us before the foundation of the world, calling us, too, to be His sons together with the Only-begotten, when we were still absolutely nothing. So the fact that with the death of the Son we have been reconciled to God is not to be heard and not to be taken in the sense that He began therefore to love those whom first He hated, like an enemy is reconciled with his enemy and the two thus become friends, and begin to love each other as first they hated each other. We have been reconciled with Him who already loved us, with whom, because of sin, we were enemies."[7]

The whole secret is this "before." This is why in one of the University [CLU] Èquipes, included in the book *Certi di alcune grandi cose* (*Certain of a Few Great Things*), Fr. Giussani said, "Just as God started from pity to draw us out of nothing, so we should start from pity, because only this [not our efforts, only God's pity for each of us] will draw us out of the nothingness of our sloth, our indolence, our insensitivity."[8]

Just as God started off from pity, so we must start off from this pity, from this "first." For us the starting point was this pity, and it is not just a chronological "first," but the "before" in every moment, before everything else, before any thought of ours. In fact, we can think only because there is this "first." If there had not been this "first," if there were not now this "before" of One who chooses us, who gives us being, who loves us with this passion, who has pity on our nothingness, we would not be, not even our thoughts would exist. We can think what we like and imagine ourselves as we like, but it is a mistake if it does not start off from this "first."

What Fr. Giussani says indicates the "method": not our thoughts, not our resolutions, but only God's pity for each one of us will draw us out of our nothingness, out of our indolence and insensitivity. We have to acknowledge this pity as something present that is happening now, as a presence that embraces my nothingness, as a present look that bears this judgment: "Even the hairs on your head are all numbered." It is not a feeling but a judgment, a look, an affirmation, an acknowledgment of the value that we have for Him who is making us now. It is striking to see someone like Fr. Giussani living with this awareness, being moved precisely by the fact of not taking this for granted, already known. "The mystery of the Trinity dominates the life of man and the world–we read in *Traces*. [...] Every day of our life is dominated, must be dominated by the mystery of the Trinity [by this mystery]. The mystery of the Trinity is the '*Dominus*,' is truly the Lord, the Master, what possesses us, so that even the hairs on our heads are numbered." He goes on, "There is not a throbbing of the soul or a sentiment of the heart that do not draw their energy and being from it [by this mystery of the Trinity]."[9]

We are possessed, penetrated to the last fiber of our being by this Presence, because we are made by Him, to the last tremor of our spirit, to the last feeling of our heart. As we said at the Spiritual Exercises, this is something given, not something agreed upon. It is not something we agree on, it is something given. Why is it a given? Because no one could prolong his own life by a second; we cannot do it either singly or all together. It is not something we have to agree on, but rather recognizing this is what brings us all to agree. "We are dominated by an Other." Communion is generated in this recognition, not by our agreeing on it.

This is why Fr. Giussani feels the need to ask, to entreat for the gift of the Spirit: "Send your Spirit and life will come back in me, send your Spirit and You will renew the face of my earth." I think that this is the concrete task for living the theme of this long time [the whole time of our life], the awareness of being dominated by the Trinity."[10] How wonderful it would be if we could all say this! "No one like us has the profound taste for being dominated."[11] How can we live this? Only if the power of the Spirit acts so deeply in us so as to make it become ours. The Spirit does not come to bring us something different from what Christ brought us, but to make Christ mine, profoundly mine, to make possible for everything we hear, all we have encountered, to become more and more our own. We all know how much, how often we are far from this awareness, from the awareness of this Presence that should dominate the sense of our "I." How far away we are! But when we had the smallest perception, even for an instant, of what this means, it was like the end of the world. So, whoever has had this perception, even if only for a minute, cannot avoid wanting it to happen again, cannot avoid the urge to cry out to the Spirit: "Make this awareness become mine, that I might not say 'Christ' as I say 'bottle,' or as I could say something formal, perhaps orthodox, but banal, which leaves me unmoved; instead, make all this become mine in such a way that I have the deep satisfaction of being penetrated by You, of being dominated." The more aware we are of our poverty, the more urgent this entreaty becomes in us, the more urgently we feel our need for an Other's help. This look, this "before" is the effect that Jesus had on everyone. He met them, as we said at the Spiritual Exercises, with that expression which the Gospel repeats: He "had compassion." "Seeing the crowds, He had compassion on them,"[12] as he feels compassion for each one of us now.

Why do we find it so hard to let ourselves be penetrated by this, and for this to dominate us? Life would be really different if we were to live with the awareness of being truly dominated by an Other, of being loved like this, with a look full of tenderness for us. The difficulty we experience is not due to a lack of energy, but to a resistance, a resistance that prevents this "before" from entering. We cannot avoid this "first"–it is there. The Mystery does not depend on us in its initiative–the initiative is His. This "first," this precedence is absolute, but it is as if a resistance in us prevents His look from entering. As we said

at the Spiritual Exercises, repeating Fr. Giussani's observation, "It is not a resistance to sacrifice [...] it is a resistance to beauty."[13] Why? Why this resistance to beauty? Because if you were to let that look enter for an instant, the game would be lost, you would be overcome by it, you would be so fascinated by it that you would be overcome. In order to stop the game, I have to resist from the start, I have to find an objection to prevent it from drawing me; I have to resist the attraction.

The Gospels witness to this resistance, this scandal ("A look like this is impossible, it is not possible for someone to look at me like that!"). So, Jesus says in the Gospel, "Blessed is he who is not scandalized by Me." But where is the scandal? Do you know when Jesus uses this phrase? He says it after John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask Him, "Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?" and Jesus answers, "Go tell John what you hear and see: The blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear again, the dead rise again, and the poor have the good news preached to them." Everything here is the expression of His passion for our humanity. In the text, after the list of the signs of this passion, Jesus adds, "And blessed is he who is not scandalized by Me,"[14] he who offers no resistance. Through all these signs, Jesus makes His novelty present; and the most disturbing thing of all was that the poor, Zacchaeus, the tax-collectors, the sinners, had the Good News preached to them. No one was excluded because of his incapacity or his evil; no one was excluded from the opportunity to share in the novelty that He was introducing into history. The tenderness of the Mystery was announced to everyone. Just as it is happening to us now, to us, just as we are, before any other thing, in whatever situation we might be. The Mystery once again takes the initiative and, even before we have warmed the chair, He says, "Even the hairs on your head are all numbered." Many times you can "feel" that when faced with this, "it is not possible." But in telling you this, Jesus introduces the true difference through which we can recognize that something new, unique, and mysterious has entered the world. And it is precisely this novelty that we can use as an alibi for defending ourselves: "It is not possible." The scandal is the alibi for not "getting moving." A love without measure, so excessive, so different, is difficult to accept for one who is unwilling. This diversity is the sign of the divine, the sign that something different, something new has come into history.

We are here to help each other. We are here during these days to ask together that the Spirit, by making the splendor of Christ shine before our eyes, may overcome this resistance and cause us to experience an intensity in living what He has introduced. We are here to grow in familiarity with Him, to take part in this novelty, so that the resistance may not win in us. Together, we can help each other to let ourselves be struck by the mutual witness, by the help that we give each other, by being together.

As a working method, we have returned to reading the Exercises of the Fraternity. I hope that we have all already begun the work indicated at the Exercises. I hope so, so that you don't miss the chance to live the novelty of your day-do-day life, for, as we said, Jesus' insistence on religiosity is the crucial question. If we don't live this religiosity, even the most meaningful relationships in life are nothing. What we want to do is to help each other understand, to enter into this concern of Jesus, which Fr. Giussani re-proposed to us in such a fascinating and authoritative way. Tomorrow we will dedicate the day to this work, to an assembly in which we can communicate witnesses about what we have spoken of, the questions that have emerged, the difficulties of the journey. We are not here to make speeches, but to accompany each other in an experience. We may have all heard some neat phrases, but after a while they are boring if they do not become our own. We cannot succumb, we cannot resign ourselves to what Saturninus said of the ancient cults: "Things that always are, and never happen,"[15] words that never happen in life. It would be a real disaster. But if the words are to become ours, they must become experience.

Accompanying each other on this journey, asking the way, sharing the difficulties: this is how we can help each other so that what we have said become more and more our own. Therefore, tomorrow's content will not be speeches, but the experience of what we have said, the work we have done. If you read the recent book of the Èquipes, you can see how often Fr. Giussani reproaches those present for not having done the work requested. I hope we don't need to reproach each other for this; I hope we can be more and more at work. It is striking that he should be telling us this after so many years, as the book witnesses, and what is striking is the similarity to what we are living. So, tomorrow we shall make time for walking together, in order to become truly companions toward destiny.

Sunday morning
August 26, 2007

ASSEMBLY

Julián Carrón. It would be enough to look at what happened to us as we listened to *Il mio volto*,[16] the first song, to help us understand what kind of work awaits us today. When we speak of going to the root of things, of broadening reason, we are not alluding to something "intellectual," but rather to an experience of reality as a whole, that does not stop short at appearances. "My God, I look at myself and discover I have no face; I look deep inside myself and see endless darkness." One could look at his face and see the endless darkness, but this is not yet everything. To look into the depth of oneself means to realize "that You are"–"Only when I realize that You are..."–even now that I am living in darkness, there is an Other who is making me. What proves that I have reached the depths of the real, and not stopped short at appearances? That "I hear my voice again and am born again like time from the memory." The proof that I have not stopped short at a purely intellectual work, but have touched the bottom of reality, the "You" from which everything comes, is that I am born again. "My heart, why are you trembling? You are not alone, you are loved; you are unable to make yourself, yet you are made." What happened to us as we sang this song? Were we reborn? Did we hear our voice again ("I hear my voice as an echo"), not as something purely aesthetic, but as the sign of a rebirth?

Our difficulty, what makes everything flat, is a "radical lack," which Fr. Giussani spoke of many years ago, as is quoted in *Certain of a Few Great Things*: "It is this atrocious lack of wonder before beauty [...]: it is an incapacity of affection."[17] And this

radical lack of affection is what prevents us from experiencing the Mystery. This is why we suffocate in reality, because man, without the awareness of the whole [the Mystery], will always feel imprisoned or bored."[18]

This year, when I had the opportunity to go to London, in the assembly we had, I perceived, I almost touched with my hand, how, without the perception of the Mystery, we understand nothing of what happens, we don't understand the most meaningful human experiences, what happens to us, and so we are more and more confused. In listening to someone who works in the city, who earns loads of money and who, after working a fourteen-hour day, goes home dissatisfied, the question arose: So what is life? Without the Mystery, without the deep perception of the Mystery, nothing gives satisfaction. You will have seen it during vacation, during leisure times: without the perception of the Mystery, everything becomes a bore. So, either we help each other, accompany each other, to perceive the Mystery, or inevitably we, too, sooner or later, will become skeptical.

We have given ourselves a task, the verification of a proposal. At the Exercises of the Fraternity I challenged you: "Do we sometimes run the risk of verifying Christ's proposal?" The time we have spent on the Exercises was to continue with this verification. Now we intend to help each other in comparing this verification.

So the theme is the verification of a proposal, not whatever comes to mind about the last thing that happened; that is of no interest to us because that will not move us along. I am not interested in hearing someone take a cue from something just to come out and tell us about it; this will not help us make a journey, and so it will make us skeptical. We have had a proposal before us for months now, Fr. Giussani's proposal: what have we done with it? How have we worked on ourselves? What came out of it? What questions arose? What difficulties came out? Where did we get bogged down? What have we not understood? All this is up for discussion, without sparing ourselves anything. We have the whole day ahead of us for walking together, for helping each other.

Intervention. Through the work done this year, and above all through the work on the Exercises of the Fraternity, I am discovering Christ more and more in my life as the One who frees

me. Through the Movement and the work on these Exercises, Christ has educated me to understand why I exist and what the purpose of my existence is. The insistence of Christ, through this charism, on my need for the Mystery, on my need for the Infinite, frees me from all the images that are so easily squeezed into my head. I recognize His presence as liberating, first of all because He proposes a new self-awareness to me. Without His presence in my life, without this charism, I would think of myself as something I am not, as something smaller. Already, this way of understanding myself frees me. The true slavery, therefore, is to falsehood, and His presence frees me because it reminds me of the truth of myself.

The second aspect of this freedom that I see growing in my life is in relationship to the truth of all things. Without Christ in my life, I would be a slave of appearances, of things as they appear, of the circumstances as they appear. In this work on the Exercises, it is liberating to welcome the invitation to enter into relationship with the meaning of everything, so that every particular moment, every particular presence becomes the invitation to the relationship with Something other, Something greater.

Carrón. Have I understood correctly? You feel Christ to be a liberator because He reveals to you the truth of yourself?

Intervention. Yes, first of all, yes.

Carrón. Which is to think of yourself correctly?

Intervention. Exactly.

Carrón. What does that mean?

Intervention. I could think of myself as a capacity to manage to do things, even moral or right things, in the Movement, instead of recognizing that I am relationship with something greater than me.

Carrón. Do you understand? The first gift that Christ brings us is a true conception of ourselves. He gave an example: instead of conceiving myself as someone who has to do certain things–so that in the end I am never satisfied–I begin to con-

ceive of myself as a relationship. If we begin to look straight at who we are, to ask, "But what am I?" we begin to let a new perception of ourselves enter us.

Intervention. For example, going to bed at night and thinking of what I managed to do is completely different from going to bed and thinking, "But my desire is greater." So, I wanted to finish by simply saying that I get up in the morning and I want to follow Him because otherwise I live like a slave. The words that announce my liberation reach me like a continuous invitation: "Follow me!" Christ never tires of looking for someone like me (and not only someone like me). He never tires of looking for me every day and saying, "Follow me!" This is truly the presence of the divine in my life, because it is the presence of mercy. Now, the more I recognize all of this that I am saying, the more I try to follow the work that you propose to us, the more I live astounded, astounded by the fact that He wants to free me, and has entered my life to free me.

Intervention. I want to stress a phrase in the introduction to the Exercises: "Christ is far from our heart, not from the activities, but from the heart, if He is not the answer to my needs, to my humanity."[19] This statement has characterized the work I have done in the last few months.

I asked myself, "What moves the heart of my soul?" The answer is, "The things that satisfy my need to love and be loved and my need for fruitfulness." I see, for example, there in Miami, the whole river of people that the Holy Spirit drew along after the death of Fr. Giussani (families of all ethnic groups, many seminarians, my boss, university students, and high school kids). I see them changing and I see the hand of God in it. The reality is so wonderful that it fills my desire to love (because I love all these people) and also my desire to be loved (because I see that these people love me) and it fulfills my desire for fruitfulness (I am a *Memores Domini*, I have no wife or children, and I tell myself, "These are my family, my children") and I am happy.

But at once I ask myself, "What moves the heart of my soul: my desire to give my life to Christ, who receives these fruits in return (because this can be mixed with my pride or with my anxiety for success) or is God the one I love more?" I love many things He does, I know many things about God, but what expe-

rience do I have of personal relationship with Him, of loving Him and of being loved by Him? And I also ask, "What is my vocation?" because in the United States, for example, many may understand what I say as if it were a job description. Often I am asked, "What can you do that a priest can't do?" Priests have activities in the parish; I follow the Movement, I have these activities. Could my soul be content with the fact of not doing any activities, no Movement, going only to the School of Community, like anyone else, and being glad to belong to Christ? This is a very difficult question for me.

At this point, I see a new prospect of work opening up, through the experience of three friends–all three of them have looked for Christ in me and are Christ for me. The first is Giorgio, because of the way in which he has accompanied Marco and me in the past few months and because of the way he answered all of us in an assembly we held in New York at the end of June. He was someone who was looking at Christ in the people who spoke; you could see it in the way he treated us. The second person is Maurizio, along with the men of the *Memores Domini* house in New York. One of them came to see me in Miami for only three hours and didn't want to see anything, none of the things that were there, no one, just me. He said to me, "I came for you." And the third is you, Julián, when I saw you this year, especially in Tijuana, and you asked me, "Who are you?" I told you all my "sins" and you looked at me with infinite tenderness.

Carrón. Wait a minute. When you do all these things and you ask yourself if this fulfills your desire, what do you answer?

Intervention. Apparently yes.

Carrón. It can't be "apparently yes" or "apparently no"–it either fulfills it or doesn't!

Intervention. No!

Carrón. You understand? We cannot play with words: either it fulfills your desire or it doesn't, because otherwise we bring dualism in, right from the start. If with all this activity, with all that happens, with all these stupendous, beautiful fruits, you were already satisfied, then why should you look for more?

Intervention. Because I am not satisfied.

Carrón. So the question is, "In what way, within the experience of what you are doing, within all these fruits you see, are you driven to look for more?" This is the dynamic, if you don't block it. And neither the visitor nor I can fulfill this demand, this desire; we open you up again to the only One in whom you can find the answer. This is the verification you have to make, otherwise you will go on relating to all that you are doing, leaving out this "something more"–but to do away with this is to do away with the "I," which is desire for the Infinite.

It is very important for us to stick to experience without disconnecting ourselves from it for even an instant. As soon as we disconnect ourselves, we begin a discourse that is "pasted on" to life, and we no longer understand anything. What Fr. Giussani taught us is a look that passes from appearances to the You, the ultimate depth of everything, of reality, and therefore it is through what you do that you realize that you are lacking something, that the desire for Something Other is reawakened. This is what I mean when I say that the idea of Mystery is lacking. It is not because I do something "religious," like saying Morning Prayer, for example, that the Mystery comes in! If I don't feel the need for Something Other, if I am not lacking something, then when I speak of the Mystery, I speak as if I were talking about a pen or a bottle, about something foreign to me, one thing among the many, not about that of which I most deeply feel the need in living everything, every circumstance.

This is the verification we have to make; otherwise, there is life as it is lived by everyone (everyone is happy when things go well and unhappy when things go badly) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, there is the religious question, and those who believe, who believe like you–those who don't believe, too bad for them, they remain in nothingness. But what is the difference? You are both dualists. The question is whether, within what I am living, in my guts, I feel the need for Something Other. That is the question.

Intervention. I am Alberto, from Brianza. I want to propose some reflections that came from working on the Exercises. Firstly, the fact that conversion is in the desire for me meant that the object and the intensity in my entreaty has changed. I have always

felt a strong need, almost an obsession, for life to not be useless (as Fr. Giussani says in a letter to Angelo Majo), that it be beautiful and constructive, and for a long time I identified this usefulness with growing up, ultimately with personal success, though participating in the Movement and its gestures. This position turned out to be sterile, though, stuck, always on the threshold, without the courage of really crossing it, stopped in a proud and stubborn desire that had neither expression nor answer.

Carrón. You see? In experience you realize that when you make a certain move you get a certain result. There is no need for any kind of abstraction. Experience leads you to see it.

Intervention. In following certain facts and the continuous stimulus of some people who care for me, what happened–the Exercises made me more aware of it–was that I began to ask to grow more mature, but in Christ's eyes, not in the eyes of the world, yielding to His attraction. I began to understand that in order to gain your life you have to lose it, that is, to gamble everything for Him who is among us. I began to be astounded by every word that is proposed to us by the education of the Movement, firstly by the School of Community. It was like meeting the Movement over again. This thirst of mine became an explicit request to my friends and to certain people who are authoritative for my life, and also a request to these days, for which I am very grateful and expectant. My belonging has passed from being tied to concepts or discourses, to being creative, that is, generating change, as Fr. Giussani says in the recently published book.[20] It is as if in the very act of reaching out my hand as a beggar, poverty became wealth and certainty, producing enthusiasm that makes it possible to take the initiative, "To grab the problem [of life] by the collar."[21] This commitment to reality and the problems arising from it intensifies my entreaty and makes it more necessary than breathing; I wouldn't be able to do without it and I don't want to do without it.

Carrón. The more you experience what he described, the more you see your entreaty growing. The test is the intensity of our entreaty. The perception of the Mystery expresses itself in this entreaty. This, he said, "makes me meet the Movement

over again," it makes me recognize the importance of the Movement for my life, it makes me understand the difference between the world's conception and that of Christ. What corresponds more, what expresses me more: what everyone is saying or this perception of ourselves that coincides with what Christ tells us?

Intervention. After the Exercises, in working on the text, I kept going back to a point in the Assembly where there was this question: "There are moments in which I don't see anything beautiful, whether it is in the community or in reality. I wonder if Christ is missing in those moments or if it is I who can't see this beauty." This question, in the end, is the one that always comes up. "Christ, in His beauty, draws me." But where do I see Him? Where is He? Do I experience Him? At a certain point you said, "You are the one who has to explain this exceptionality to me, because what comes to my mind when I see this exceptionality is, 'Who is He?'" and you added, "How many times, when we are together, arises the question: 'Who is He?' before a tangible form? We take it for granted. For us, the School of Community is a lesson." Then you said (this is the point I wanted most to understand), "The difference now is that the question comes to me more and more from reality, from what I'm living."[22]

What I am looking for, what we are all looking for is the look of Christ. But this is what we can most take for granted. Lately, I am forced to ask myself the question, "Where do I see this exceptionality?" Asking myself when I go to School of Community, "What have I seen today?" has been the occasion for me to rediscover the look of Christ.

Carrón. Where?

Intervention. In life, in reality. Asking myself those questions, the change in the people around me, for example, was no longer self-evident. I saw a human reality changed that forced me to say, "This is the presence of Christ," that is, Christ is coming to me through this look, through this real point. I perceived in this period that not taking everything as self-evident, but beginning to ask myself, "Where do I see this exceptionality today?" helped me to rediscover, to experience this look more, to be more joyful, happier.

Carrón. This is a question that comes up again and again: "There are times in which I see nothing good, so where is Christ?" Let's go back to what we said about the song. At times, when you begin to look at yourself, you see only endless darkness, you see only nothing, you see an aspect of reality that is anything but beautiful. The question is whether or not we stop there. I ask whether this endless darkness is everything, or whether, though I perceive this darkness, I am there, my "I" is there–and this is not equal to nothing. I am there. Therefore, even with this endless darkness, in this moment, "I am made." There is no endless darkness that can prevent me from acknowledging this "I am made" ("You cannot make yourself and yet you are made"). Any situation at all–however beautiful or ugly–is itself "made." Every situation is part of reality and so cries out to an Other.

What happens instead, like he said, is that it is self-evident for us. What does "self-evident" mean? It means that we are not aware that the very fact of realizing this is that we take it as self-evident, that is, we are like a child that takes for granted the gifts it is given. He gets a wonderful gift, and is enthused by it, but forgets that someone gave it to him. His mother stops him and says, "What do you say?" In other words, she introduces him into reality, forces him to realize that it is by no means self-evident that someone should give him a present.

When you begin to look at what is in front of you in this way, you begin to perceive numerous signs: you begin to consider the fact that we are here together as not self-evident, or that someone changes, or that there is a small bunch of people who say Morning Prayer together in that place (they may be a small bunch of tramps–there is no need to censure anyone because of his limitations–but it is not self-evident that they are; but all the same, they have been taken and fascinated by an Other). So, not alongside reality, not in our thoughts, but in reality, right there, we begin to spot His presence, to become aware of it, because we don't take everything for granted.

This is an education in looking, in using reason according to its nature: awareness of reality in the whole of its factors. We must broaden reason so as not to take everything for granted, otherwise we are irrational, that is, we don't take account of what is there. Since it seems self-evident to us, we have no need to use reason. What is the issue, then? That reality reawaken in us a

question that demands an answer. If I do not let reality reawaken this question in me, then I stand before what happens without looking for an answer, I don't go beyond appearances. But when I am in endless darkness, so much so that I cannot stand myself anymore, it is there, right there, not alongside, not after, not before, that I am forced to go to the bottom of it and recognize an Other. We either educate ourselves in this constantly–then every situation in reality is, as was said in the first intervention, an invitation to recognize it, to recognize the Mystery present–or we are condemned to suffocate.

Intervention. Yesterday evening you reminded us, "All the hairs of your head are numbered." Starting from this I decided to recount these two episodes that happened last year.

This first concerns my job as a teacher. Last winter, an African nun registered for the examination. I was convinced she was not prepared, despite having attended my lectures, partly because of the language, partly because of her cultural background, but I would have been sorry to fail her since I knew that her order had sent her to Italy for professional formation to be used in her country of origin. On the other hand, to pass her when she wasn't up to it would have been against my professional ethics.

Carrón. One of my teachers used to say that to fail someone who is not prepared is the first work of mercy.

Intervention. I asked a colleague and a friend in the Fraternity to confirm this for me, and he told me to have no scruples about failing her if it were the case. However, this advice didn't convince me, it didn't answer the ethical question I had posed to myself. I was still perplexed, so during the examination I looked at her differently from the usual aseptic way I deal with students during an examination (a booklet in which to write a grade). Looking at her as a person and not just as a client or student made me more attentive in the way I posed the questions, as well as in evaluating her answers. This made me realize that this attention does not mean being less severe, but makes the relationship with the student more just.

The second episode is more recent and more tragic, too. At the end of June a young person with whom I had a work relation-

ship died in a car accident. A few days later, his widow, whom I barely knew, phoned me. She had found my number in his phone book and she wanted to thank me because a few weeks earlier I had spent the day with her husband solving some technical questions, and he had gone back home very happy, telling her that I had promised to see to the publication of some poetry of his. She thanked me for having given him one of the best days of his life before dying. I was speechless. In actual fact, we had spent the whole day talking about orchards (I specialize in fruit trees) and only in the last few minutes had he confessed to me his secret about the poetry. I don't know why he confided in me, but I think I understand from what his widow said that he felt looked at as a full person, not just as a good technician. I realize that this way of looking at the Mystery of the "I" is not a capacity of mine, but something that can be learned.

I come to the question: relating to someone by looking at the Mystery that is in him is beyond one's role or social mask; it is giddying and leaves us naked, disarmed, without psychological defenses. How can it become a normal attitude, without defense and fear of losing your position prevailing? Can we live without masks? It is a naïve question, but not a formal one.

Carrón. What do you say?

Intervention. My problem is how to keep this attitude of openness toward the other.

Carrón. For us, content and method coincide. There is no "how" separated from the content. The fact is that we can stand before the mystery of the other if we ourselves live this intensity in perceiving the Mystery. Otherwise, we reduce our "I" and reduce the mystery of the other. So, the question is: what constantly reawakens this perception of the Mystery in us, what makes us aware of our mystery, what brings us out of our obtuseness and makes us aware of this? It is reality, as we have always said; and the most real reality of all is the presence of Christ here and now. In so far as we have this perception of ourselves as mystery, we can—as I sometimes say—"take off our shoes" before the mystery of the other. Otherwise, we are like a bull in a china shop, we reduce the other to a mechanism we can interfere with as we like. But this would be nothing but vio-

lence, and above all it is useless, because the other, if he wants to, can leave us on the doorstep–thank God–by exercising that freedom which is a weapon against any presumption of power.

Intervention. I would like to understand, in terms of experience , what you said to us about "pity" as the beginning of everything. Because if I look at my experience over this long period, I would say that it is more a fight, a fight against evil, getting up in the morning having to fight, as St. Paul said. Often, in the environment where I live, I have a daily relationship with envy, with power, with jealousies. This doesn't mean that I don't see Christ present. He is there, I can say that I recognize Him here, there, and there. I can say, "It is the Lord!" Two examples: when you came to see us last year you spoke of a new beginning. After the meeting with the responsibles of Brazil in February-March this year, that new beginning was visible in many small communities throughout Brazil. There is a vivacity being born and I see many wonderful things happening. Secondly, this year we began the Company of Works with a group of university lecturers, and two weeks ago we organized a small Meeting. What moved me and filled me with gratitude was to see what was happening, to see the big personalities who agreed to come and speak and, above all, the number of people who came (more than 600). It is the first time we have held a meeting like this, led by a group of university lecturers, and the friendship with them is another novelty. I could also speak of my own personal life, my vocation, etc. So I see many things that the Lord is doing, but I would like to better understand that statement about pity. In my life, it is as if the Lord were saying to me, "You have to fight. If you do nothing, nothing happens. You are the one who has to get moving, you have to fight against this envy, this jealousy, this power, this non-life." Is it clear?

Carrón. Sure! All you say is true, life is a fight. But why do many people get tired of this fight? Why does someone give up in the face of difficulties after a while? The question is how to keep up this fighting position, and this does not come from ourselves, but from "something that comes first," and it is called pity, as I said yesterday. Where does this passion come from, this fighting attitude? Where do you get it, what makes you do it, what is the source?

Intervention. The desire for truth.

Carrón. And who keeps this desire alive in you? You see how we assume it is self-evident? I want us all to help each other to make the journey within experience–we reach a point in which we assume the origin is self-evident. But if you were not constantly looked at with this pity, if you were not to let this pity of Christ enter into you, what would become of your fight? Where does your drive come from? This is why many people start off and then get tired and say, "Now I'll take care of myself."

When we speak of charity, for example, we immediately think of what we have to do, of our struggle, but we take the first part for granted–the move that makes this possible, the Mystery's move.

Last year, I held an assembly with the first year novices of the *Memores Domini*. The subject was charity, Fr. Giussani's lesson on charity. I began the assembly by saying, "Let's begin!" All the hands went up. "No," I said, "the first question is mine. What phrase struck you most?" One of them answered, "This one." Then I asked, "How many of you were struck by this phrase?" Some answered "yes." Then another person quoted another phrase and I asked again, "How many were struck by this?" and so on. Now, the majority had missed the main point. All of them had the temptation to focus on the fight, on what we have to do, on our attitude of charity toward others. But the first charity is the Mystery who is moved to give Himself. This is the "before" we spoke about yesterday. The first thing is this "first." This is why I quoted St. Paul, St. John, St. Augustine, the Pope, etc., because this "before" is the "before" of everything, it is the "before" thanks to which you are here now, it is the "before" of the Mystery who gives you life, who causes you to *be*, now.

If I were not to have this "first," this pity of the Mystery for me, I could not stand myself. This is the first move. The *Angelus*, as the Mystery's method ("The Angel of the Lord declared to Mary"), is this "first," this pity. All the rest is a consequence. Without it, there is no source for sustaining the fight. Who sets you right when you get tired, when you are wounded by things? If you were not to find a look full of pity for you, one that gets you well again, that heals all the wounds of the fight, so that you can go on fighting, you would send everyone to hell: "Get lost!" You would have no more interest, you'd forget everything.

So how can we become true protagonists, intent on the fight, without stopping? This is possible only if we have first been loved! "I have loved you with an everlasting love, and have had pity on your nothingness."[23] This is the phrase I was looking for in the novices' answers, but they all took it for granted, as self-evident. But this is the most moving thing there is! Our Lady has this awareness, that the Mystery has had pity on her nothingness. "He looks on His servant in her nothingness."[24] This is pity, and it is always "before" anything else, so it is the source of everything else, of your "I" and of your fight. If we don't understand this, sooner or later we get tired.

Cesana. After hearing the interventions and your final observations, I'd like to ask a question. At times, it is as if the affirmation of the "I," the affirmation of self, instead of being a liberation, is a prison of unrealized desires, even Christian desires, of incapacity for relationship, etc. Why is it that the "I," the affirmation of the "I," instead of being a liberation, becomes a prison?

Carrón. The affirmation of the "I" becomes a prison when it does not correspond to the true nature of the "I." What is this true nature? What defines me? What I am able to accomplish (and so I can never be satisfied), or relationship with the Mystery? It is only because the nature of the "I" is relationship with the Mystery that we can be free. If many times we are stuck, if life becomes a prison, it is because on this point our mentality is just like everyone else's–for us the nature of the "I" is not relationship with the Mystery. So this morning, as I re-read this passage, it struck me again: "...outside the awareness of the totality, man will always feel imprisoned or bored." We are imprisoned or bored when the awareness of the totality, of the Mystery is missing. This is why I think these Spiritual Exercises are absolutely crucial: what is in question is a mentality, a conception of self. All that happens in life, feeling stuck, imprisoned, or bored, is the echo in me of the fact that I am made for relationship with the Infinite. I feel imprisoned or bored because I am not made for anything less than the Infinite (it's like a shoe that doesn't fit). If we don't take a step forward in the conception of our "I," in the way we look at ourselves, we are ultimately like everyone else, with the same mentality. We may add some pious exercise, organize meetings, do whatever

we like, but we have the same mentality as all the others.

Since the "I" is relationship with the Mystery, if this does not become familiar, then we are prisoners. All of Fr. Giussani's insistence in Chapter 8 of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*,[25] which we took up at the Exercises, all the insistence and tenacity of Jesus in recalling people to religiosity, are to bring us out of this prison. Religiosity seems to us like something "pious" for experts, for "religious" people, not the nature of our "I," and in this way we suffocate in reality. Saturday morning's lesson at the Exercises was on this point. Either we understand why Christ came into the world to introduce us to religiosity, why He insists constantly on the fact that without this religiosity there is no humanity, that religiosity is the condition for humanity, or we remain stuck, imprisoned. This is the great challenge: the fight that is going on in the world today, the great cultural debate is concentrated here. Either we experience this, or we are like the others, prisoners. Then we can tack all the discourses we want onto this experience, but we bring nothing new.

What did Jesus do? Jesus entered history in order to reawaken this way of looking upon man. And how does He reawaken it? By making it happen again. So we are friends if, when we are together, entreaty opens up, that is, if we have the aspiration that the Infinite come in. Here lies the question. If it is not clear to us, then we must give it all the time it takes; we are not in a hurry, because all the other things that we don't understand, all the other things that make us suffer, that make life burdensome, depend on the fact that this is not clear, is not resolved. Fr. Giussani states that without awareness of the Mystery all the other most significant human experiences are nothing, meaningless, empty (the relationship between husband and wife, work, etc.). So we suffocate. We have to give ourselves all the space we need to help each other in this, to document it in various ways. But let's be aware that what we are doing cannot be clarified only by holding assemblies; someone has to have the courage to verify it in life, because all this can only be clarified in experience ("reality becomes transparent in experience").

Cesana. So, going back to what you said yesterday evening about "pity," the problem is not only the awareness with which we look at the Mystery, but also the awareness of how we are looked at by the Mystery.

Carrón. It is clear. Yesterday, in order to explain this "first"–that is, how the Mystery looks at us–I began by quoting a phrase of the Gospel: "Even the hairs on your head are numbered." What did Jesus come to bring? This "first." Not because this "before" was not there previously (we were created, so this "before" was already there), but because we were not aware of it. As St. Thomas Aquinas says, we could have reached this awareness, but only a few of us, after many errors, and a lot of confusion.[26] It is Christ who, by becoming flesh, makes this recognition easier. When I hold an assembly with the first-year novices and we speak of charity, I am concerned then that they understand this "first," just as now I am concerned that we understand this "first." Otherwise, we take it as self-evident, like when we recite the *Angelus* in the morning. We are not moved. Who was moved this morning reciting the *Angelus*? For us it is self-evident. Instead, it is not self-evident, because you might not have been here, or you might have been distracted this morning and not been aware of anything. It is not self-evident, not by any means! You realize it when you begin to be moved; it is not automatic that I say it today because I said it yesterday; it is not automatic that I am aware of it today just because I was aware of it yesterday. It is an event. I am aware of it because it changes something in me: "When I realize you are there, I am born again." That is, I understand if I have let this "before" enter because He makes my "I" be born again, He makes my "I" happen again, He reawakens my desire for Him, He reawakens the entreaty. This is what prevents the reduction of my "I" to something self-evident. But this is the fight that Christ has brought.

Intervention. For me, the first environment for verification in these last few months has been my job. In the faces of my students, in their questions, I experienced One who is calling me, who makes me true again. The relationship with this One is what interests me most, because it makes me free in front of the students and in my work, it makes me relish everything more.

If I am honest, though, I have to admit that a place where I am educated is vital, and this happened this year in the relationship with Franco. I am new to teaching, and at the end of every day I would go to his office and tell him, "This and that happened to me; what does it mean?" or, "I would do it this

way, how would you do it?" and we tried to judge together. When I went there this year to teach, other friends of mine began to have this dialogue together. When we told our colleagues, they saw how happy we were. Soon we found there were ten of us, then twenty, and now there are forty of us.

This place helps me to go to class with a more human attitude, a truer and more open one, to measure myself against the reality that is calling me. I was on the telephone speaking with a student's father. He was in tears and said, "Help me with my daughter, she's making us desperate." I, who am twenty-six, was able to say with my whole self: "I do not have the solution, but I, too, want your daughter to grow up. If you want, we can work things out together. This evening, I'll come to see you at home." So a friendship with them and their daughter began, one that was moving for all of us. In that place, it is my life that is in discussion, the whole of my "I" before reality, so much so that I have begun to realize what is happening to me, in many details, to the point of being moved by the beauty of what I am teaching or the inexplicable presence of my students who question me like a mystery. With history teachers, for example, we have seen that in order to understand the Middle Ages we have to identify with them. So we did a re-enactment of the Battle of Hastings with 250 students, who reproduced the phases of the armed conflict, before the parents who were astounded. There, in particular, I was struck by the enthusiasm and the unity amongst the teachers, which the kids noticed with amazement as well.

In the method lived this year, I see it is possible for the beauty that appeared to keep on happening. The method is an authoritative place that helps us to identify with the origin of this beauty. I want to ask you to help me to outline this method more clearly.

Carrón. The method in which I can help you is that you begin to recognize what is happening. For I have no other method but obeying what happens. I have no secret page hidden, no direct line to the Holy Spirit. I only have what everyone else has: reality, experience, what happens, a keen loyalty to what happens. So you have realized that the more you are present and answer the reality that calls you, the more you feel the need for a place that constantly introduces you to this reality. Like what happens

for a child. What does it need in order to grow? Life, which awakens him to all the problems, and his mother beside him, who introduces him to life. It is simple.

We have an "I" that enters into relationship with reality. What do we need? A place (a father, a mother) to introduce us into reality. That's all. The more you enter into reality and the more reality interests you, the more it arouses a need for an all-round dialogue with others. Thus, the relationship between us becomes more interesting; it doesn't become formal; it is not a series of meetings, but a sharing in life's adventure. This is what I'm interested in, and all the organization is either a service to this, for helping us in this, or it is of no interest to us (in *Certain of a Few Great Things*, you can see Fr. Giussani's fight for this question). The more you try to verify this, the more the reasons for what we are living becomes evident, and we perceive the human usefulness of it. It is the verification of faith, the verification of Christ, not abstractly, but as intensity of life; it is called the hundredfold. It is within everyone's reach. You just need to take part in this adventure.

Intervention. I want to speak about this year, which saw real upheavals for me. I began teaching and I decided to get married, and now I find I have an immense gratitude. At the end of the year, I realize more than before that I am full of needs. There was not a day, in my work and in the relationship with my fiancée, in which I didn't need to ask everything from Someone. And when I left a tiny space to this Other who was calling me through the circumstances, a novelty exploded. Some examples: For two years now, with the Cento Canti Dante Assocation founded by a group of friends from the Catholic University of Milan, who perform poetry by Dante, we have been able to go around to schools for presentations. On meeting the students coming out of class, every time I felt a wound: "What am I bringing them? Who am I to stand before these kids?" (This is also the reason I began teaching, because I wanted this wound to re-open every day, not just once in a while.) After two years, despite the fact that at the start the thing was absolutely gratuitous, we got the idea that it could be transformed into a job, and we thought that this would be faithful to reality. So at the end of my university years, I had the problem of deciding what to do. I went to Fr. Pino and said, "These are the facts of reality, so next year I want to do this." He

turned this over into a question: "But what is it that you are looking for? The problem is not the Cento Canti, but your life. What do you want to do with your life?" When I came out, I decided to begin teaching. I'll tell you briefly how the thing developed. First of all, a group of sixty high school and university students was formed, who would come on Saturday afternoon from all over Italy to speak about Dante. What surprised me most was to see the kids' faces changing; and I was changing as I looked at them, I saw the same truth happen in them. The same thing happened with the teachers. And the question went straight to the point. "Who are you? What is it that makes you like this?" In all these things–marriage, work, and so on–I realize that is the initiative of an Other. I did nothing but obey.

My need is–in fact, you have already answered it up to now–for you to give me a hand in reading these events.

Carrón. No, you are the one who has to do the reading, because you have the heart and what you have lived. Now you cannot go and sit down without giving a judgment.

Don't think I'll do the work instead of you. What emerges from the experience you have described? We cannot recount all this and not give a judgment, otherwise it would change nothing, we learn nothing. What do you learn from what happened to you? You are the one who has to do this work!

Intervention. I will try to say just one thing. It was evident for me that I had understood little about Christ before this year, because it was something self-evident and above all different from what I was doing. What I felt itching my skin this year was the fact that these things, these events, the faces of these people were Christ.

Carrón. What do you mean? Don't be generic.

Intervention. The different criterion that I saw in some people.

Carrón. The different criterion. This is something fundamental. It could happen that you are very pleased with Cento Canti and then reduce your whole horizon to Cento Canti. Your desire stops there, you believe you are following reality, but you

stop short there. Now, this cannot prevent the Mystery from taking the initiative, if you let something else enter–if, for example, you go to speak with Fr. Pino, if he is a friend because he poses the same question to you: "What use is it to gain the whole world and lose yourself?"[27] In other words, "What is it you want?" This is a friend.

What do you need? A friend, someone who–in whatever situation, however reduced your horizon may have ended up–opens you up to greatness of your "I": "What is it you want?" and re-opens the whole debate, reopens the wound and your whole human question. So you might be enthusiastic before your students, and they, in their turn, without tiring of what they desire, provoke you. And you are once again solicited by reality, by a piece of reality, to be yourself.

We shouldn't worry about the reduction. The challenge is not this reduction. The only challenge is that when the Mystery, Christ, through the way He chooses, enters once again into your life and re-opens the wound, you be honest with it. We do not have to be afraid: He will see to putting us face-to-face with something that will re-open the wound, re-open the whole breadth of reason, of desire, of the human drama. The question is only whether we accept it in that moment. This is what we need: this honesty before an objectivity that imposes itself. The objectivity is the Mystery present, Christ, who constantly reopens the drama, otherwise, even before something beautiful, you get stuck, you get stuck in Cento Canti, you get stuck with your girlfriend, then you get married and get stuck in your marriage. The wound has to be constantly reopened. Otherwise, we lose the best of Cento Canti, the best of the girlfriend, the best of our job, the best of everything, because we are drowned–what seemed beautiful becomes a tomb, with or without an epitaph: "Here lies a fan of Dante."

Intervention. While you were speaking of honesty, I felt I had to speak because I ardently desire to look at things for what they are. In our community something dramatic happened, a kind of earthquake, that took the ground from under our feet (a dear friend, a point of reference for us, suddenly left) and this makes us ask even more urgently, "Who am I? Who do I belong to? What interests me? Why are we together?"–as if formalities and appearances had fallen away. In these circumstances, I saw the

difference between stopping short at the darkness you spoke of earlier, that is, being together at Pascoli's "fireside" (crowding together to escape the storm, someone curses in the night, but substantially you remain in nothingness) and a desire for life, for truth, for good, so you don't accept the darkness and begin to cry out, to ask for a true consistence for yourself. I saw the radical difference in our being together, which acquires a different nature, and becomes communion. It is not a question of avoiding looking that weakness in the face, that frailty that can make you deny everything, but, rather, paradoxically, of actually helping each other to stay at that level. The communion among us becomes necessary not in order to say, "You live for me," but in order to sustain the desire to enter into the whole drama of life, to be more aware that we are nothing and that everything comes from an Other. We cannot take for granted that from an "evil" good will come out, an awakening of our conscience. This emerged when we became aware of our condition of radical need and we weren't ashamed by it, to the point that we grabbed hold of the hand that was outstretched to help us and which indicated another method. For we were still looking at the problem, and the more we looked at the problem, the more we were floundering. Instead, the person who helped us said, "If you want to understand, embrace this difficulty, too; you need to look at something else, for example, what happened in Rome."

Carrón. What you are telling us is rather cryptic for most of us and to make it clearer I'll take an example from the Gospel. When the disciples were there with Jesus and all the others went away, He did not spare them the question, "Do you also want to go away?" In certain situations, when we see certain things happening–beautiful or ugly–what can make a negative fact, like the fact that all the others went away, become a good for those who stay? That you are ready to face up to the fact that it brings out the question, "Do you also want to go away?"[28] This forces the disciples to answer if they want to stay. This generates an awareness in them of why they stay, and a communion among them that was not there before, because their reason for staying is clearer. It is not a question of coming to an agreement on how to manage, as we do sometimes. "Now, how can we tackle the question?" No, each of us has to face up to the question that

comes from reality. In reply, everyone is forced to take up a position. Each one of the disciples had to recognize why he stayed there, and this made them understand the reason for their communion better. Without this, every difficulty that comes up in a community becomes something "less." But it is not necessarily so; this is an answer of ours, as in everything. When someone has problems in his job, when someone has problems with his wife, or with his circumstances, or with his friends, when someone has problems with the community, the real problem is not the problem! For anything at all is an invitation to get to the bottom of things, to take the question that comes out seriously, so as to trace the ultimate reason of everything, that "before" that is the consistence, for which it is worthwhile to pass through all the circumstances.

This is our work, friends. Jesus has not spared us this and we cannot skip over it without renouncing our humanity–because a man stands with all his humanity, with all his reason, with all his freedom, before reality. If we accept this, then all that happens in life can be constructive, unexpectedly constructive. Otherwise, it crushes us. Here we see the importance for life of that perception that Fr. Giussani speaks of, of the fact that I am not part of the mechanism of the circumstances, but relationship with the Mystery. For most people, the circumstances are a tomb; for those who have this awareness, everything becomes an opportunity for re-flourishing. Even the darkness becomes an occasion for becoming aware of "You who are," and this makes me born again.

We have to decide whether or not we want to be loyal to this urgency that comes from reality. For the Mystery calls us through reality; we do not need "mystical abstractions." It is through reality that the ultimate depth becomes clear like the appearance. True mysticism consists in this: seeing the depths as ordinary things are seen. There, all were going away and it seemed that that was all, but Christ's question made them go beyond appearances; they perceived the depth of reality in all its evidence, that is, the reason why they stayed. And the reason was in the depth of themselves, in that correspondence that they had perceived in the encounter with that Man; yet, without that question, without that event, they would not have been aware of it.

So, everything becomes an opportunity to grow in this awareness; nothing is our enemy; everything becomes a "step,"

as Fr. Giussani once said, something that introduces us to the Mystery. Thus, the depth of the usual things become familiar; thus, the Mystery becomes familiar. We have to experience this, so that when certain things happen, we can help each other. Otherwise, instead of helping, we make things worse. It is inevitable: if you don't have this perception of reality, of the Mystery, you complicate things further.

Let's stop here. We can go on in the afternoon. The free time is for going forward with this work. We are here in a gesture, there are no moments of work and moments of interval, everything is an opportunity to help us to understand more.

Sunday afternoon
August 26, 2007

ASSEMBLY

Intervention. The first time I heard you saying that you could not get up in the morning without thinking of Christ, I understood that it was what I wanted most in my life. From that moment, in these two years, I have begun a struggle to reach this position, with no result. When I read the phrase of Fr. Giussani. "We do everything for Jesus but the heart is far away,"[29] a great sadness came over me, because I didn't know how to overcome this distance. This summer, I read two books that struck me and, at the same time, again filled me with sadness (Chekov's *The Steppe*, and Roth's *Job*), since there too, they speak of that familiar relationship with the Mystery that I wanted for myself. Yesterday, when I heard the phrase you began with, "Even the hairs on your head are numbered," I realized, through grace, that the method is completely different from the one I was following and that my problem is that the look the Mystery has toward me is not familiar to me. The method is another–it is a man, Jesus, who tells me. "Even the hairs on your head are numbered," and that, when everyone goes away (as happened after the multiplication of the loaves), He asks me, "Why do you stay?"

Carrón. The method is turned upside-down. It is not something I have to look for, but the Mystery who reaches me through reality. It is the "before" I spoke of yesterday–this objectivity of reality that comes to meet me, because reality is the sign of the Mystery, it is the Mystery who continually takes the initiative. We can stay in the Movement for years without this becoming ours. It is the reason for my insistence on Chap-

ter 10 of *The Religious Sense.*[30] This is why Fr. Giussani says that Chapter 10–as you have heard me repeating until I've bored you–is the key to our way of thinking. Without reality, there is no "I," the "I" emerges, is reawakened, in the impact with reality. It is reality that reawakens all my questioning. And reality may be beautiful or ugly. It is not true that when reality wounds me it does not reawaken my questioning–even that reawakens my "I," and the Mystery comes to meet me. What I have to accept is the impact of being–I can be distracted and full of difficulties (whatever you like–"I've been hurt, the boss fired me, my wife has no time for me"), but I cannot prevent (and this is the liberation) the following day being full of sunshine. This is the objectivity that no interpretation of ours can avoid–none of my wounds can prevent the following day being fine, can prevent me coming face-to-face with an absolutely gratuitous gesture or look from someone else. Despite all my problems, all my sadness, nothing can stop me from hearing the words, "Even the hairs on your head have been numbered."

We must not play the part of God. Our responsibility is to be ready for what He does. This is what puts us at ease, because I cannot stop myself from constantly decaying, I cannot avoid it; it is useless to fight against it. The question is that I be true when the Mystery grabs me by the hair again, when He reawakens me, when He comes to meet me.

Our problem is an atrocious lack of affection, I said this morning, taking up a phrase of Fr. Giussani. What amazes me is how impenetrable we can be. Someone told me last year that for a whole year he had been hurt by something–for one year! I said, "For this whole year in which you were determined by this wound, did nothing happen, did the Mystery not come to meet you, was it all nothing? Let's not talk nonsense. For a whole year, you didn't care at all for the Mystery who was coming to meet you!" The problem is not that something hurts me, the problem is not that I have some bone of contention or some difficulty in life, some confusion, the problem is not that this or that happens. This is not the problem; we cannot avoid these things, we cannot put up a wall to defend us from all the bruises of reality. The problem is that, in this situation, the Mystery is not standing still, because we are not the ones to decide what the Mystery does; the Mystery comes to meet us, and we have

to deny it continually. This is our immorality, this is our resistance. It is the second thing I said yesterday, after stressing the "before"–the resistance we can hide behind. The problem is not that reality wounds me, but what I have done after all the initiatives the Mystery has taken toward me during the year, what I have done before this objectivity. If the objectivity of the matter is not clear, then tell me, because this is what consoles us most of all. I cannot avoid certain things happening–this "first," this permanent initiative of the Mystery does not depend on me, on the fact that I am angry or not. The Mystery takes the initiative with me even if I am angry, whether or not I am hurt or angry, say what you like, but He does.

Intervention. I wanted to give an example of this and propose a method. Last year, I realized, at a certain point, that Christ was becoming imaginary for me instead of a Presence to recognize. I understood this from many facts: when praying, my mind was wandering and nothing struck me; at work, the most important thing was my career; in the Movement, I was asserting myself. Above all, that structural disproportion that makes things dissatisfying, instead of becoming entreaty, was becoming a constant complaint, and I was forever complaining with you, too. Then here comes the presence of the Mystery. All at once, I was thunderstruck by a phrase of yours: "They miss the best part." There and then I realized that I had the presence of the Lord before me and I wasn't seeing it; it was in you and the others of the house who were looking at the Mystery–that is to say, they were seeing in reality something that I was not seeing. Therefore, the method for coming out of it was not to ask you to look at me, but to look where you were looking. At Mass, for example, I sometimes notice how you identify with the gesture being celebrated, or how, when faced with difficult circumstances, you have a kind of interior peace. So, for me, it is like wanting to peek at what you are looking at, so that I can see what you are seeing. It is question of method–when the Lord reveals Himself, we have to begin looking again. It seems to me like going back to the beginning of the life of the Movement. Look where someone else is looking, follow him; it is something simple and it simplifies things. You just need the humility to say that the person before you is greater than you, and sees while you do not see.

Cesana. I realize one thing: that we think of the Mystery as what we don't understand in what we have–mystery is what I don't understand in my wife, for example–whereas, the Mystery is the woman who says she is mine. That is, the Mystery is what we understand of what we don't have, of what has been given to us, of what is not ours. The difference is abyssal, because in the first case, in the end, the criterion is always myself, whereas, in the second case, all that happens is a broadening, an opening-up of meaning, that is, something to learn. This is Christianity. Jesus Christ is that life, that presence, that experience that continually opens up the question about reality.

Intervention. I want to recount a fact and ask a judgment. Some time ago a seventeen-year-old boy who got to know the Movement and keeps company with us (he is not at tending university but, for various family problems, drugs and prison, lives with the university students), wrote me a letter, in which he said something that corresponds with the second lesson at the Exercises, commenting on the phrase: "The law of existence is the gift of self."[31] I would like to understand on what condition this is possible. In his letter, he spoke of this episode: "A teacher came to give a witness during a study vacation and I was struck by the relationship he had with his students. Amongst other things he said, 'After all, all the love I have for others is because I love myself.' I don't understand this phrase. Even the people who rescued me from suicide kept telling me, 'Don't thank us, because what we are doing for you we are really doing for ourselves.' As I didn't understand, I went to re-read the Gospel, and it doesn't seem to me that Jesus gave His life for Himself." He went on to recount two more meaningful episodes: "I went to the study vacation with the university people. As I am still in high school, I had nothing to study, so I went to work in the kitchen and cooked for everyone. I worked ten hours a day. I had a strange experience–in giving myself to them, I rediscovered myself." Then the second episode: "Something similar happened to me when I went to the CLU Exercises. I heard Carrón, I came home and I wanted to tell all my old friends what had happened. Only I wasn't well, I was unable to make photocopies, so I made some copies of Carrón's lesson from *Traces*; I made a few copies by hand and now I know it by heart. Even by doing this, in serving, I found I was more myself."

On one hand, I was very struck by these things; on the other, I

discovered that it is as if, almost naturally, or naturalistically, he discovered what it means to live, that is to say, to give one's life. A dramatic question came to my mind, though: How long can this kind of dynamic go on? If this dynamic doesn't find a vanishing point, one can die in it. While you were speaking of the "first," that tough phrase of St. Paul came to my mind: "If I were to give away all my belongings, and give my body to be burned, without charity, it is worth nothing."[32] I would like to ask if this has to do with the "pity" you spoke of yesterday. I have another question. Having seen that boy, it is evident that one can learn the law of existence, but not get anywhere; one can practice this law and not reach the point where that law saves one's life, because what saves life is the "first," a Fact that happens. So I want to ask you: We who are before this spectacle, moving as it is, what can we do so that the sacrifice of one's life, even when it is for an ideal, be a flourishing of life and not end up in dissolution?

Carrón. Someone passed me a phrase of Seneca that was the text for the matriculation exam this year. I'll quote it in order to say how this dynamic you have described is the law of life, so one can have the genius or the grace to discover it. Seneca says, "I have what I have given."[33] This is the law of life: to give oneself. It is not that the law of life is this because Christ says so. Christ reveals a stable mechanism: that life is to give oneself, that I possess life by giving it, and the more I give it, the more I become myself. It is not the "Christian" law of life, it is the law of life *tout court*. This is why the boy can discover it, can experience and grasp that dynamism. You ask: How long can someone remain like that, without something to reawaken him? I would say that it is difficult for him to persevere; one can reach this in a moment of genius and then decay.

What interests me, though, is the second part of your observation: one can persevere in this research—you said—and never get there. This summer, in the Mass one day, the first reading was that passage from Genesis[34] in which the Mystery appears to Abraham and Abraham at once goes about welcoming that Presence (slaughtering the calf, preparing the meal, and so on); he is all intent on honoring that Presence. The Gospel was that of Martha and Mary.[35] It seemed that Martha was doing just like Abraham—she too was all action, but Jesus rebukes her. This means that one can do all these things, perhaps, but in the wrong way. I often

asked myself why He rebuked her. We have often been told about the opposition between contemplation and action. This idea came to me. "Martha, Martha, you fuss about many things…" Why does Jesus rebuke her? Because in her service, Martha has not the Presence before her at heart, her service does not fulfill her affection. What shows this? The fact that she blames her sister: "She doesn't help me!" Now, if someone is so enthusiastic to serve someone why does she care if the other is not there? I am so happy to serve that it is not a problem if my sister doesn't help me. If, instead, I am serving in an inadequate way, it can be seen, because I am not satisfied, that is, my affection is not fulfilled. The problem is not between action or contemplation, but it is the kind of relationship, wheter or not the relationship is enough to satisfy. This is why Fr. Giussani said that it is reasonable only to give oneself to a person. The "all" is a person, God. So, if in what we do, affection for God, for the Mystery, for Christ present, is not dominant, then action is an endless chain; it never ends and leaves us unsatisfied, and this can be seen from the complaints we make. All generous people sooner or later end up complaining because their concern is not to affirm the Other, the relationship with that Presence capable of satisfying the heart, but only what they are doing.

Since the nature of my "I" is desire for the Infinite, all I do is nothing compared with what I desire. The problem therefore is not solved by doing, but in a relationship. This is why Jesus defends religiosity so doggedly. Either we learn this or we will always be dissatisfied, even if we are busy doing things in the Movement or outside the Movement, as responsibles or holding meetings–it will be our grave. We empty the mystery of the "I," and expect to manage with what we are doing or with what we get out of our job, or out of our wife, or out of our vacation. No! I'm sorry, each one can verify this in his experience. Without the Mystery we don't understand anything. What I desire is the Infinite, so it is only in relationship with the Infinite that I can find an answer.

This seems to us something "spiritual," not the law of life, not the revelation of the Mystery. We tell each other these things when we are in an assembly, but in life we move with different criteria, we look for satisfaction elsewhere. Let's look at ourselves in the face, let's observe the dynamic with which we move, let's scan our day–we are busy the whole day, but our dissatisfaction remains, like for Martha. All the heaviness and recrimination

come out from this unease and have nothing to do with most of the things we talk about. The ultimate origin is here–our affective problem is not solved, because this problem is solved only in a relationship, which is called religiosity. Either we help ourselves in this or, whether we like it or not, since it is the law of life, not the "Christian" law of life, we will always remain dissatisfied. This can be seen in the fact that we take it out on those around us, those who suffer the consequences of our unsolved problem. We can pretend in front of others, since they don't see how we move in reality, we can do School of Community and various meetings, but then we suffer the consequences, and those around us suffer the consequences, too. It takes a lot of courage to look life in the face and not tell each other a lot of nonsense.

Intervention. I realize that I always fall into a trap, that of thinking that we have been given something, but not that we have been given everything. I think it is what you said when you spoke about the "pity"–we have been given everything, we have been given being. And the Mystery could have called whomever He wanted, He could have called people much better than me, but He chose me. This for me is the true origin of gratitude.

Two things in particular touched me this year, of all that I have lived. The first was to see how my son, who has begun high school, has gotten involved in GS–he has never missed Mass or the School of Community. And I never said anything to him, though at home he has always seen the kind of friendship I live. The second thing is about my old lecturer at university, she was the only non-believer in the Department. On March 24th, though 70 years old, she was with us in Rome in St. Peter's Square, under the rain. God can truly change the life of anyone at all. We are asked to watch. However, I would say that we have to look for Him, because if we don't look for Him, look for His face in what happens, it is difficult to see Him.

Carrón. We have to recognize Him, because He makes Himself present. Look at the examples you gave (your son, your lecturer)–even when you are distracted or overcome with problems, there is always someone through whom the Mystery wakes you up, there is something He causes to happen. The Mystery doesn't come just like that, He comes through a sign. The only thing is that when the sign reaches me, when the Mystery reaches me

through that sign–whether it has the face of a son or of a lecturer–I am there, ready to recognize His presence. You cannot reduce what you see in your son to a series of circumstances; you cannot reduce the presence of that lecturer in Rome to a series of circumstances, you have to think of Him. There are gestures, moments, in which the Mystery makes Himself so clearly a presence through the sign, that you are not able to reduce it. This is the tenderness of the Mystery, the tenderness with which He reaches you. The question is whether or not, when the Mystery makes Himself so clearly present, you are there to recognize Him. It is there that it can be seen if you are looking for Him, if you are in the attitude of looking for Him, ready to look for Him. If you do not recognize Him in the sign, you realize that you are not looking for Him. On the other hand, you realize that you are looking for Him because in that moment you give in and recognize Him–it is He who constantly takes the initiative. And this is a relief, because I am not the one to sustain the Mystery. I have only one responsibility–to respond, to give in to Him when He makes Himself present. Then life is something else.

Intervention. Today, I am touched and full of gratitude because everything you said describes my life and helps me to understand it. My life is marked by the fact that–either by choice or by constraint–I am faced with needs. I have been a doctor for twenty-four years, I have a twenty-year-old daughter who is seriously disabled, and I head a non-profit organization for the disabled. That dissatisfaction you spoke of describes my life perfectly. I wanted to give myself, I wanted to give my life for Jesus, but it was like giving a little of my life, as much as I could, to the needs I met. Several times in my life, above all today, I realized that it is precisely the person I want to help (for example, my daughter) who has been the cause of my conversion, that is, the way the Mystery has attracted me more to Him. When Giulia was born, my wife and I were on the margins of the Movement. Over these years, the Mystery has attracted us more and more to Him. Now I'll say something that might sound strange: the relationship with her is the clearest way of relating with the Mystery.

Carrón. Look at this man: either he is mad or he is right, because to say that a disabled daughter is the preferential point in the relationship with the Mystery is either true or it is mad-

ness. This means that there is no aspect of reality that cannot become the way, cannot be used by the Mystery in order to attract me. As a novice said to me, "There are no positive or negative circumstances." What everyone could define as "negative"–if you are ready, if you look, as we said before, if you are open to the way in which the Mystery touches you–can become the privileged opportunity for a relationship with the Mystery that is unique, exceptional, and that even astounds you.

Intervention. One last thing: I would give my life completely for my daughter, but I realize that this giving oneself completely of which you spoke at the Exercises (giving one's life to Christ is the only way to satisfaction) is possible only when it is clear for me that what I have before me is not a need that I have to solve, but the Mystery who is choosing me.

Intervention. When you quoted Fr. Giussani's phrase, "Because man, without the awareness of the whole [the Mystery], will always feel imprisoned or bored," I thought that what makes a man's life great is precisely this relationship with the Mystery, with the Infinite–only this measures up to what man aspires to. I want to tell you a short episode, a recent image that illustrates this.

At the Rimini Meeting I was with my teacher, George Smoot, the Nobel Prize Winner for Physics this year. He was very surprised by all the wealth of life that he saw around him, but what struck him most is that all this pivots on the free, gratuitous offer of so many people, young and old. One evening, we went to San Marino for dinner. A boy from Rimini was driving the car we used. As we came back–it was very late–he wanted to pry further: "Who provides the cars and the drivers?" so I confirmed, "The drivers are all volunteers." So he said, "O dear, so we are making someone suffer who could be at home." I translated Smoot's remark to the boy and he replied at once, "No, for me it is a joyful suffering." I translated his observation to Smoot, who was dumbstruck. A "joyful suffering." I was thinking of Smoot with all his genius, all his tension and his restlessness, incapable because of his history, to see so clearly what that boy saw. One can say "joyful suffering," as Ercole did just now, only in relationship with the Mystery. What is greater–from the point of view of what a man is, that is, of the realization of human life–the

genius of a Nobel Prize winner or the simplicity of a person who recognizes the Mystery? It is like having to see again what makes life worth living. One can give his body to be burned, but without this link with the Mystery he cannot be satisfied.

Yesterday, you said, "It is pleasant to be dominated." It is only the Infinite that we can accept as what dominates us, nothing finite can be accepted as what dominates us; even the most important, the most brilliant, even the community in the sense of those who make it up. There is nothing that can reach the heights of our aspiration. But this infinite would still be an abstraction if it were not a person, as you said before. This is something dramatic; it is something fascinating that we can look at and follow in our company.

Carrón. This episode strikes me because our temptation is always to impose our prejudices or our measure on reality–except when we are faced with a fact that leaves us dumbstruck, and instead of dominating the fact ourselves, we are dominated, overcome by it. If there were no moments of this kind, the Mystery could do anything, but in the end, we would reduce everything to the usual explanations. But not even a Nobel Prize winner can stop himself from being dumbstruck before an absolutely gratuitous gesture. If there were not these moments, we would find answers, explanations, and interpretations to avoid being struck by anything. It is good that some things happen that we cannot dominate, then we have to take them seriously, and this is the great question of philosophy. If the conditions for the possibility of knowledge (see Kant) impose themselves on reality or if there is something that is so powerfully disproportionate that it does not let itself be "grasped" by the conditions of possibility, then the horizon opens. If this were not the case, then we could dominate everything and be in peace, or at least without drama. Instead, not even the intelligence of a Nobel Prize winner could prevent him from coming face-to-face with a fact that made him dumbstruck–instead of dominating, it was he who was dominated. Here begins the drama, because I am called to answer. It is the drama that unfolds between us and the Mystery, through certain facts, certain moments, in which the Mystery imposes itself with this evidence. These are facts that we cannot put in our pocket, which we cannot reduce to antecedent factors.

Intervention. My experience this year, both in public and in private, was characterized by a great testing, a kind of tsunami that crashed over my head. But more important than the test is He who allowed it. In the end, this is my experience: that God is Mystery and that Mercy showed itself to me. But my resistance to it goes on. It is not that once this testing has happened to you, this fact that then turns out to be a *kairos*, a moment of grace, we put it in our pocket as something to spend in the future. The event of His presence is in every instant, and in every instant there is my resistance. I would even say–but I ask you–that this resistance is a gift, because it makes me understand indirectly what I am resisting, the beauty that is coming forward.

Carrón. It is impressive that a fact that makes you suffer can become a gift of grace. But you cannot then put it in your pocket. Without something present, we fall back. We have not to wait for some disaster to happen. There is a constant presence, which we call Church, that is the presence of Christ who has promised to be with us "all days, until the end of the world."[36] This is the presence that reawakens us constantly. There is no sickness or circumstance able to reawaken us continually like the Church, like this presence that constantly challenges everything.

I have to say that resistance is never a gift–resistance can contribute to making you aware that beauty is there, but it is not a gift in itself. It is resistance to beauty, to truth, and so it is not good. However, resistance can witness that beauty is there, precisely because I resist.

Intervention. When you came to Peru in September, something crucial happened for me. Everything became simpler. It is as if you had helped me to see the pity and the compassion of the Mystery, the choice Jesus had made of me. Apart from my abilities or inabilities, it is as if, on arriving, you had said to me, "You are here, therefore, the Lord wants you to answer." This brought my "I" into play again, it freed me from a thousand images. I am simply called, and therefore free to answer, without having to prove anything. In a retreat I took part in, when someone asked you, "How much am I worth before Jesus?" I heard you answer, "You are worth Baptism, that is, Jesus has chosen you, and no one can take that away from you."

The experience this year, the work on the Exercises of the Fraternity and the School of Community, made it clearer to me that inside reality there is another factor. Over these days, as I look, I cannot take for granted what I see, I cannot reduce it to the sum of what we can do. There is another factor; I am not the one to add it, and it is very evident, if one chooses to look.

There is a "but," though, that I would like to show you. To pass from this affirmation to say "You" with that emotion that changes life (it is not enough for me to say, "Jesus is there," I have to say "You"), it is as if it were not to depend on me, or not within my grasp–I can only beg for it; it is not the outcome of an effort of mine, but His gift.

Carrón. It is a gift that introduces a look that becomes yours, and it is an education in which nothing is mechanical. It is not true that you have to do nothing. You have to recognize it, that is, your "I" must come into play. If Christ enters into history to help me to recognize the Mystery present, to facilitate this recognition, and does not reawaken the "I," does not get my "I" moving, He remains on one side and I on the other; nothing happens. The facilitation worked by Christ does not spare the "I," it sets it moving. So to say, "You" to Christ is a work, it is a gesture of your freedom. As I have repeated many times, regarding Chapter 10 of *The Religious Sense*, Fr. Giussani, starting off from wonder at reality, takes us by the hand and leads us to say, "You" to the origin of that wonder, to the point of bringing out the reality that strikes us. But it is not spontaneous that this become more and more mine or yours, that this look on reality that does not reduce everything to our own measure become familiar, that seeing the depths as I see the surface become normal. It is an education, a work, not something spontaneous. Certain moments are so imposing that they facilitate the acquisition of this look, but it will not become ours spontaneously. We have to grasp this. We are presumptuous; at times it happens to us so easily that we think we don't need to do any work. Jesus, and the Church as His continuation, came to educate us in this work, as we shall see in tomorrow's lesson.

We have just begun, we have begun to glimpse what life can become when this look becomes ours; we have begun to taste what it means. The only adequate reason for going on with this work is the love that each one has for himself and for his destiny.

Monday morning
August 27, 2007

LESSON

Julián Carrón

As we said at the Exercises of the Fraternity, Jesus made the conception He had of life present by means of His person, by means of His presence, with His gestures, His look, His miracles, with all this. He made the perception He had of life present by, the way He looked at man, making it happen in those who met Him. The method through which the Mystery has introduced us–just as for the disciples, the first ones who met Him–to the Mystery of life, is the person of Jesus, the encounter with Him, sharing life with Him. If we don't want to reduce what happened, the method has to be the same all through history. We cannot replace it an instant later with a discourse, with an abstraction. There must be a presence that makes present–through actions, through looks, through the whole of life–that perception that Jesus introduced into history.

This is why there is chapter in *Why the Church?* that corresponds to Chapter 8 of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, in which Fr. Giussani deals with the "mission of the Church toward earthly man."[37] In this chapter, the same method that Jesus began with at the origin is re-proposed. It is useful for us to go back again to this chapter with this perspective, even if we have studied it in the context of the course on the Church. So let's take it up again from the perspective that comes from the question that many of you expressed in yesterday's assembly: "How can I be helped today to discover and live the conception Jesus had of life?

How can it become mine? How can all I have lived at the Exercises become familiar for me?" This cannot happen–as at the beginning–unless by means of a presence, the continuation of the presence of Christ, which is called Church. And if we read this chapter not only with our eyes fixed on the Church as a whole, but also on our companionship, on the Movement, on the groups of Fraternity, on the communities, we have to come to terms with many factors we often forget, asking of the Church and of the Movement what the Church and the Movement cannot give.

Fr. Giussani begins the chapter by asking what the function of the Church in history is. If the Church is the protraction of Christ, the function of the Church is the same as the function of Christ. But what is the function of Christ (as we saw in the Exercises and during the assembly yesterday)? The education to the religious sense, to religiosity. Jesus struggles relentlessly to make us understand the value of this religiosity for our lives, for the salvation of man. He makes us understand that religiosity is the definition of the person, that is, that the person is direct relationship with the Mystery.

If the function of Jesus in history is the education to the religious sense, to introduce us to religiosity, in the same way the Church's function is to educate man in this religiosity, which Fr. Giussani defines thus: "Man's exact position toward his own destiny in terms of conscience and his attempt to live it in a practical terms." The Church's function is therefore an educational one, it is to educate us to the true position, because "Salvation is generated by the truth of man's position in regard to himself and his ultimate destiny." Man cannot find this true position in introspection, in scientific analysis, in ideology. The definitive word on the structure of the individual man, on ourselves, we find in Christ, "The Word [who] communicated Himself to man by becoming flesh."[38] So Christ had us discover that our "I" is constituted by the direct relationship with the Mystery by making it happen in us, not by giving a lesson of philosophy. In the encounter, He made us understand that it is only in the relationship with Him that we rediscover, acquire, an intensity of life; we reach a feeling of ourselves, a fullness, that alone we are unable to reach, that no analysis, no attempt of ours can give us.

I. The definitive word on man and history

First of all, therefore, what Jesus does–and what the Church does–is to bring us the definitive word on man and on history. "This definitive word can be traced back to two expressions: The term 'person' [...] and the phrase 'kingdom of God.'"[39] He causes us to understand the nature of our "I" "person": it is absolute irreducibility, by the fact of its direct relationship with the Mystery, and the meaning of the whole of reality, for which the person himself is made, which can be synthetically expressed by the phrase "kingdom of God." The meaning of reality, in other words, has a face and a name: Jesus. Without this, unless we become aware of this, we are lost, we stop short at the first reaction, the first feelings that comes to us, or we reduce the meaning to what we like.

It seems very little to say that Jesus has brought us this true conception of the person and has offered us the meaning of everything; it seems very little (and we often succumb to bewilderment precisely because this seems very little to us), but–look at the perception Fr. Giussani has–"this definitive word [on man and on his meaning] saves man."[40] We can all verify that this is true. We can recognize it by looking at our experience. When Jesus entered into our life, He made us truly discover our "I," He made us experience the fullness to which our "I" is destined, and we discovered that the ultimate meaning of our person, what we are made for, is Him, Christ. This is what saves us, what has saved us and saves us, every time it happens. If it seems very little to us–so that we go on searching, as if nothing had happened–it is because we don't have the awareness that Fr. Giussani has, that this is what saves man. If we were truly honest with our experience, we would all be forced to admit: "It is true, literally true."

"This word [...] saves man and steers him to a correct position in regard to both himself and the world. [...] It sets him on the path to his true freedom [...] and therefore his religiosity."[41] When the Pope says that the encounter that gives rise to faith "gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction,"[42] he is saying just this. So, Fr. Giussani summarizes, "The Church, as the prolongation of Christ, claims to give man this definitive word: the *person*, immortal man, untouchable, irreducible, who can be exploited by no one; man, in function of the *kingdom of God*." Person and kingdom of God; in other words, this man, who we are, irreducible, if fulfilled, finds his meaning only in the king-

dom of God, "the secret order of things which time may sometimes help to obscure, but which will, nevertheless, lead toward its ultimate clarity,"[43] and which has a name, Christ.

So, if each of us does not live with the contents of the Exercises, where all this is said concisely (in the first and second lessons), so that it becomes his, he will be lost, he will go on being lost and will be continually overcome by his moods, by the circumstances, by everything. We have the instruments that Christ has made available to each one of us for the road; let's use them!

II. A continuous reminder

But we all know that clear and precise ideas, the right doctrine, are not enough. At the first bend we will go off the road. Fr. Giussani says we need a continuous reminder, a place that educates us to this religiosity.

For what does the education that qualifies the Church's mission consist of? It consists of a pedagogical concern: making man aware of what God is. It is expressed in continuous reminders urging man to "live the awareness of his total dependence on the Mystery."[44] We saw it yesterday in the "on-going battle" of the assembly–if there is no place that educates us constantly, that reminds us of this, even all the clarity of the chapter we covered at the Exercises[45] is not enough. A presence is needed, a place, in which we can be constantly educated, reminded of this awareness.

What therefore should we expect from this place? To learn total dependence on the Mystery, that is to say, that the law of life is this "dependence on the Father who shapes our life in every instant, who is the continuous source of our existence." We have to expect "impassioned pleas that call me back to the reason why I am irreducibly 'I,'"[46] because dependence on God is what makes me myself.

But be careful: from a place like this, from friends, from the Fraternity, from the groups, from the communities, we must therefore expect this continuous reminder, this impassioned plea–like that of Jesus–for religiosity, so that we can constantly verify in life whether the statement "in dependence on God I become myself" is true. If, in my experience, I don't perceive that this dependence is the greatest good, then no reminder will be enough. So we have to look at those moments in which living

this dependence made me reach an experience of life that I myself, with my thoughts, my plans, my moves, am not able to give myself. I have to admit to the fact that when Christ enters into my life through a place and makes me live this dependence in an existential way, it makes me more myself. If we don't experience this, then we are on the defensive. We can be here, in the Movement, take part in the gestures, and everything you like, but we defend ourselves.

I say we have to look at those moments, because something like we have said is almost unimaginable to our reason, reason conceived as measure. For the overall mentality, for the context we are in, the idea that I should become more myself in dependence on God is the last thing that comes to mind; but it is on this that the Lord is challenging us, and He challenges us by making it happen. For the presence of one who has experience of that "impossible correspondence" that Christ makes possible, the experience of that overabundance of fullness that he finds himself in, it is the greatest challenge that man can receive, that our freedom can receive–and this is the beauty from which we often defend ourselves. For us, Christianity, as we have received it, encountered it, was not a discourse, it was an event, the event of an encounter in which this correspondence happened, and we have all had, and have, the chance to look it in the face. But we do not have to face up to who knows what, to our idea of Christ, to some leader, to the responsible of the community–we have to face up to the experience of the "impossible correspondence" that each one of us has had. It would be easy to face up to something else, but when you have had such an experience of fullness of life, whatever happens–even if tomorrow you have a different perception of yourself and of reality–, you cannot erase what happened (like when you have tasted a very superior wine–whatever wine they serve tomorrow, you will never forget the one you have tasted). It is useless. It has happened, it is an event.

If what we have said up to now were only a theory, we could quite safely throw it in the bin. But if what we have lived is an experience in which the true perception of our "I" as dependent on the Mystery, if the fullness that our "I" (my "I," not man's "I," but mine and yours) acquires in this relationship has emerged clearly, then we can no longer go back. This is the experience made possible by the Church today, by the Movement today, by that last terminal of the Church that has reached us. By shaping

us ("Providing, molding, You give us form… like an artist," says an early medieval author quoted by Fr. Giussani[47]) and then reminding us of what we have experienced, the Church becomes an essential support for traveling the road.

So man–this is the Mystery's great tenderness–is not alone. "By definition he is in the company of an Other, who is the Father," who generates him. We have been generated, "we are" generated, and the day this does not happen we will die. "This is why, when the disciples asked Jesus how they should pray, He found that the best way, within the horizon of human experience, was to illustrate the individual as a child in his parent's arms; he told them to pray to God, calling him Father, 'Our' Father." When is the last time we prayed the Our Father with this awareness? In making us pray like this, the Church reminds us, in an absolutely maternal, discreet but untiring way, to recognize that "man is defined in terms of a company that implicates him in the very origin of things and remains with other men," because we all have the same God, who is our Father. "If this bond is obliterated, man will lose himself in the social web. The Church's ceaseless urging is necessary to defend us from that isolation which makes us such easy prey for exploitation. Only true religiosity is the boundary blocking any type of invasion and exploitation, even the ecclesiastical variety [and we can add: even by CL, even by its leaders, or friends…]."[48] If we begin to look concretely at day-to-day life, we begin to unmask the exploitation even in what goes on amongst us.

By introducing us, reminding us of this religiosity, the Church reminds us of that "before" of which we spoke in the introduction, of that "before" without which we constantly slide back onto what we have to do. No, before everything else comes the recognition of my origin, of what I am, of what is the meaning, because without this I do not have the "best position for facing human problems."

III. The best position for facing human problems

"The Church […] urges us to adopt the 'right attitude' toward ourselves and life, […] to realism, to a type of behavior in which we are reminded how things really are."

Every day we find we have to face problems. These problems "are the fabric of our days and our every hour," and we have in

us "The impetus to solve them." Our attempt is firstly to solve them. What is the temptation? To think that the Church, the Movement, the Fraternity, that the friends, must solve our problems. But "the Church indicates the best position to adopt for facing human problems," it educates you in this position so that you become the protagonist, so that you may not act childishly, so that every one of us become the protagonist of his own life, so as to live all the circumstances. Fr. Giussani says, "If we live the consciousness of our original dependence, which is the first supreme truth, then all problems will fall within a framework which will make solving them easier."[49] This is a friend! The others are only so in name. A friend is someone who reminds you constantly of the original dependence and so puts you in the most favorable conditions. He doesn't solve your problems, he doesn't give you the recipe for getting out of them. If we read this observation in the context of our concrete life, we realize how often we take no notice. We see it as something banal, because we take it completely for granted, but it is what we lack most.

The Church's aim is not to solve problems–the problems are not solved–but to put us in a position that will "make solving them easier." The religious sense, religiosity, is the rock on which to build the house. "If man puts himself in the right position, he can face a problem and try to resolve it. If he is not in the proper position, the very approach to the problem becomes more complicated."[50] It is literally like this. We, instead, think that religiosity has nothing to do with tackling problems, that it is useful only for doing meditation in the morning; we think that it is a premise that has nothing to do with the way my "I" looks at and engages reality.

The idea that the point is the relationship with the Mystery, religiosity, and that this is what makes it easier to tackle problems of any kind, is far removed from our way of thinking. Just think of when there is a problem in the family, in one's marriage, at work, in questions of affection: the last thing that comes to mind is that what is lacking is this attitude of religiosity, that is, this unique relationship with the Mystery that alone permits us to have the proper attitude. We don't deny religiosity, God, the Mystery; no, we don't deny it, but it is "out of the question." It is outside our mentality that this religiosity should be relevant to our problems. Let's look at how we go about things. We chat with everyone, we ask everyone, we do just about everything but put ourselves in the

proper attitude, that is, think that the proper attitude is to live religiosity. This is the last resort for us. When we have tried everything, we end up here, but the situation has to be very serious! This shows how far off this is from our way of doing things.

But Jesus says, "Truly I say to you [look what text Fr. Giussani refers us to] there is no one who has left house, brothers and sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel, who will not receive a hundred times as much, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land [...] and in the world to come, eternal life."[51] Only those who give this precedence receive everything–they are given everything, given back everything. "In other words, the right attitude could also mean being detached from our own point of view or from that fragment of life we might like to hold on to as if it were everything. Yet, if this detachment transpires, it generates a new and true wealth, a new and true possession of things and affections."[52] Only if you give precedence to this love for the only One who can fill the heart, only if you realize that your "I" is fulfilled only in this dependence, in this relationship with the Mystery, which has a precise face for us, which is Christ, only if you give precedence to this experience of fullness, can you have the proper position, the proper detachment, not as the result of your own effort, but as a consequence of the fact that you have let Him enter.

How often have we found ourselves weighed down, tired, arriving at a meeting with all our cares, not knowing where to begin to solve our problems, and, without having even mentioned what was troubling us, we have been overwhelmed by something present, and we came home with the desire to tackle everything with an absolutely different attitude. These are not fairy tales. It is not true that Christ is equal to nothing and so is all right for the spiritual life, but not for tackling historical realities. For it is only His presence that sets us in the proper attitude for taking things in hand again, that puts us in the right position for dealing with everything. It is as if Christ were to say: "You can't manage alone, you cannot get into this attitude by yourselves. You can only receive it, accept it when it is given to you. When I fill your heart, when my presence is able to make you experience a fullness that is beyond this world, then you acquire the proper attitude for looking at everything."

If this is lacking, Fr. Giussani says, the problems "change within our very hands." The "spiritual life" does not change, but the

problems change! The problems change within our hands; they grow more complicated. The reason they change is that "we are not oriented toward our own origin. If we were, we would view those same problems in a way that would highlight their workable side, in a manner that would allow us to accept them, or else, in a way that, looking at ourselves, we would find the strength to ask for help. [...] We would be focused on Something larger than the individual problem."[53] What puts us in the correct attitude is exactly this: that there is Someone who attracts us so much into Himself, in the place of His presence, that standing there, you find you are changed, not because you tackle the individual problem you have before you, but because something else is introduced that puts you in the proper attitude for looking at it.

IV. The problems of man

Only in this way can we deal with the problems of man, which are, as Fr. Giussani observes, culture, love, work and, politics. "Each of these categories groups different facets of the obstacles and problems man must face on his journey." And he adds, "If the Church were to proclaim that its aim were to take over the human effort of self-advancement, self-expression, and human searching, it would be acting like the kind of parents–to return to the mother image used before–who are deluded into thinking [beware!] that they can resolve their children's problems by taking their place."[54] It is what many of us do. They think they are helping you, by taking your place, just as you think you are helping others by taking their place. It is disastrous!

The Church's function, like that of the Movement and of each one of us, is not to take the place of others, because then we would be deluded, like those parents who think they are solving their children's problems by doing things in their place. Now, if someone treats you like this, you know it is not right, and if you let yourselves be treated like this, you are conniving with them. In any case, this is not the function of the Movement. "It would be an illusion for the Church, too, because it would mean falling short of its educational task." Taking the other's place is to fall short in the educational task. It is easier to take someone's place than to educate him! It is easier to solve a mathematical problem for your children rather than accompanying them until they are able to solve it; it is quicker. So, if someone comes you give

him the recipe, instead of spending time with him, because to accompany him you have to see him again and again. In this way, though, the child, or the friend, will not learn, and we do not learn. If we want to educate, we cannot do it in this way. We have to stop fooling ourselves and ask ourselves what really helps us. When I ask someone to solve my problems, I do not want my own good; when I protest and get angry because the other does not give me what I ask, that is, solve my problem, I do not want my own good. It is an illusion, which has two consequences: "it would diminish the essential history of the Christian phenomenon [Christianity would be denatured], [...] it would impoverish man's journey [your person would be reduced]."[55]

V. The Church's task is not to solve human problems

"The Church's direct task, then, is not to provide man with solutions to the problems he encounters on his way." Its function is "education of mankind's religious sense," that is, "the right attitude before reality, [...] an attitude which constitutes the best condition that man can have for finding more adequate answers to those questions."

But there is no possibility of educating which does not pass through freedom. The solution cannot "be removed from freedom." Someone who takes the place of another person takes away his freedom. If we take the place of others we take away their freedom. It is as if "the Church were to provide a pre-packaged solution." We, too, often ask for a pre-packaged solution, but this will never be the charism; just as providing prepackaged solution will never be the Church's task. Fr. Giussani quotes this Gospel passage, which is very instructive: Two brothers who are disputing an inheritance go to Jesus and one of them says, "'Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance, He said to him, 'My friend, who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?'" But that's not all, because Jesus gave them the criterion for traveling the road: "Watch and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist in possessions, even when someone has more than he needs."[56] Jesus does not solve the problem, but gives them the criterion for taking up the right attitude, so that they can solve it themselves. He does not accept the role that the brothers want to assign Him. Perhaps they remain a bit disconcerted. It would have been like

being told, "Sort it out yourselves," after they had asked for His help. In fact, Jesus gives them the criterion for finding the right attitude for solving the matter themselves; He does not accept the role they want to force on Him. Many times, people ask us for solutions and, since we are "charitable," we are ready to answer, but this is not charity, because we are taking their place. It is not a question of saying nothing–we ought to give a suggestion of the way to go about finding the solution. This is the only way a person grows, the only way he is educated. ("I won't leave you alone, but I won't stand in for you.") This often seems little; we want a pre-packaged answer and the others, in their turn, ask us for a pre-packaged answer.

VI. Facilitating aspects of a truly lived freedom

"It is not that Christ and the Church have no function at all," even though at times it seems so, and this is why we want to go beyond this position, setting aside freedom, taking the place of others. Since it seems little, we want to get there quicker and we take their place. No! "It is not that Christ and the Church have no function at all." Christ's and the Church's reminder is not "the magic formula for the mechanical avoidance" of certain wrong attitudes or of certain things; reminding about religiosity "is the basis for which the solution may more easily human." No method can avoid certain risks (no method, for example, with which parents can avoid risks for their children). With our companions, with youngsters, with university students, with adults, we constantly have to lay the foundation in order for the solution to be more easily human. To us, this seems very little. Instead it is "the beginning for construction; it is not yet everything," because it passes through freedom, which is "the essential symptom of the humanity of the solution."[57]

VII. The work of every man

The work of every man is to look for the solution himself; the solution is the task of the individual. "God does not oblige man to be himself if man does not so wish. [...] He does urge him, He does remind him continually," but He does not impose it on him. If man accepts, Fr. Giussani says with a beautiful observation, "if we sincerely confront the state to which the Church calls us,

we soon start to experience an energy and pride in settling down to work [...] with a special kind of intensity."[58] If we accept this challenge, all the energy we have within us is awakened. When we give the pre-packaged solution, instead of awakening all the energy–in which the "I" comes out and becomes protagonist–man becomes paralyzed. This is why it is an illusion.

The outcome of education is the emergence of all my potential, so that I become a protagonist, and I relish being a protagonist; the opposite is when there is someone who answers me and takes my place; he doesn't challenge me, he does not make me come out with my whole "I," with all my potential. The Church, then, proposes to us "this absolute and intransigent affirmation of religiosity." It is not abstract, because "it is the foundation of a construction which is the task of each one of us."[59] The Church truly educates us, allows us to enter into reality every time as protagonists. This is what fascinates me. I was aware of the novelty that was coming into my life because it made me a protagonist. These were the first symptoms of novelty that fascinated me. So I became fond of this journey, which has never ended since that moment, which fascinates me more and more, because I was not like that before. What I encountered permitted me to come forth with all my capacities, to venture myself in a way I had never thought of before. This is the outcome of this educational work, if we accept the challenge. If we refuse it, perhaps we can spare ourselves some demanding steps, but we will never step beyond; we remain paralyzed.

VIII. Religiosity will never be wholly lived in history

Religiosity will never be wholly lived in history. So we have the Sacrament of Penance in order to start over again. Life is this struggle, and without the mercy that makes us set off again, at a certain point we would give up. The image of life that Fr. Giussani proposes to us is, therefore, that of a tension.

IX. The Christian's moral tension

But the proposal of life as tension, if we think of it for a moment, is what most coincides with our "I." In fact, it is as if Christ were saying: "Be loyal to this tension you have in you." The Church always appeals to this tension that is in the depths

of everyone's being.

Life is a journey. The Christian is a *homo viator*, and when you are walking, "the experiential mark" of this journey is peace. "The tension to affirm reality, as Christ's gaze did, is the foundation of peace."

However, "the human subject faces problems with an attitude befitting his humanity and his destiny. And within the realms of this attitude, he is called to apply his freedom, he is called to work. This happens in the awareness that his journey is tentative, open to correction, and that his freedom is fragile, in need of forgiveness. And because of all this, he is always beginning again."[60]

Tuesday afternoon
August 28, 2007

ASSEMBLY

Intervention. You said that "it is easier to take someone's place than to educate him." We have seen a time in which educating seemed to be taking someone's place (I'm speaking of GS). Now it seems you are asking us to take a step backwards. Don't we risk leaving the other alone in his decision? What does it mean to keep him company? What room is there for obedience in this game of freedom?

Carrón. This is a question that reveals the difficulty we have in understanding a relationship. It has been almost a cultural difficulty for centuries; it seems we are always and only able to affirm one thing at the expense of another. An example: it was thought that in order to affirm God it was necessary to eliminate man. Then atheism came along: to affirm man you have to eliminate God; and so on. This is the history of the West: in order to affirm one thing we have to do away with another; one thing is affirmed only at the expense of another. If we are speaking of education, to affirm the educator we have to eliminate the one being educated. And if we say that we are not to take his place, we no longer know what to do as educators. It seems we have to take a step backwards, which is absolutely mistaken.

So where do we start from? We have to start from an experience in which I can recognize and affirm the presence of another, not at the expense of my "I," but as the fulfillment of my "I." When I fall in love, in the affective relationship, I realize that I am more myself precisely because the other is there. Without the other, I do not reach fulfillment. So the other does

not have to draw back, he has to be there with all his presence, with all his exceptionality, all his beauty, all his charm, all his humanity, all his fascination, so that I can really be myself. It was like this that the Mystery entered into history. Starting off from this natural experience, this is the method God used for keeping us company.

It is documented continually in the Bible. The Mystery did not enter history to do away with man. On the contrary, the presence of the Mystery in history is what brings out the "I." Some years ago, Fr. Giussani spoke to us about the call of Abraham as the origin of the "I."[61] It is the Mystery that enters into history that brings out the "I." And this reaches its greatest expression in the Incarnation. The presence of Jesus did not affirm itself "at the expense of" that of the disciples. His exceptional nature gave His disciples an experience of their "I" in a way that they would never have imagined before, or ever dreamed of.

It is the same experience we had with Fr. Giussani. With us, Fr. Giussani never drew back and never took a step backwards (it is just as well!) Did we perceive this as his taking our place, like something that was doing away with us, or was it precisely his presence, his exceptional nature, his ever-present genius, all his humanity, all his fascination, all his attraction, that generated a people like ours? This is not how we think, so we have to correct ourselves. For without a humanity, without a presence that offers itself totally, there is no education; it is not possible to generate an "I." Often, since we are not truly a presence, we replace it with power or with instructions. Someone who is a presence has no need for power or for instructions, he just has to be there.

So the challenge is that we have to learn a different awareness of ourselves, not as a power, but as a presence that reawakens, that is able to fascinate, to promote the other's "I." Without this, there is no education. If we want to educate people to be responsibles, we cannot do it by giving instructions, but by becoming more ourselves, in the measure in which we obey something that arouses us, that generates us, in such a way that the way we live everything, with which we face life, with which we rest or enter into reality, may fascinate others so much that they don't want to lose it.

This is being companionship, the rest is all tripe, because what you need and what I need is a presence. You do not need to be

less, or paralyzed. You need to have something new, something exceptional that can strike people. So what is needed is obedience to what generates us, because it is what generates us that re-awakens my freedom and that of others. This is what is at stake. Either we who are here and have a responsibility learn this, or inexorably instructions take over.

Intervention. It is true that the reminder of religiosity seems little to us. Usually, for us in the U.S., religiosity is understood as being spiritual, or sentimental, or pietistic, etc., taking us out of reality. So help us to understand better what religiosity is and how it takes us into reality.

Carrón. The first thing to understand is what religiosity is, because if religiosity is being "spiritual," sentimental, or pietistic, then it has nothing to do with reality. But if religiosity is the need the "I" has for totality, if it is the awareness of one's own constitutional needs, in experience we can begin to discover what reawakens these demands, that need for totality we have in us. Then we begin to understand that what reawakens religiosity is precisely reality. This is Fr. Giussani's great genius, and we have been educated to it in Chapter 10 of *The Religious Sense* (which we still find hard to understand as the key to our way of thinking). He says there that, in order to be religious, we have to live reality intensely, for it is reality that astounds us, fills us with wonder and therefore, through all its attractiveness it reawakens the ultimate questions, it reawakens that need for totality.

And reality can be beautiful or ugly. It is not that when you are ill those questions are not reawakened. They are not reawakened only by the beauty of the mountains. A sickness, mine or someone else's, can bring them out, and dramatically. It is reality that brings to the surface all the need for meaning we have in our relationship with everything. So we can say that, without reality, without a relationship with reality, there is no religiosity. There is not on one side religiosity and on the other side relationship with reality—without reality there is no religiosity, there is no "I."

However, letting oneself be reawakened by reality does not mean stopping short at appearances. If we stop short at appearances, sooner or later reality will no longer interest us. We have all experienced how many times things that have aroused our

interest in time lose their fascination, their capacity to interest us. Reality awakens religiosity in so far as I let myself be led to the very depths of it. So, in that chapter, Fr. Giussani does not stop short at the initial wonder, which does not last with time (whether it is Dante or something else). We have to be careful–if we don't cover the whole way to the point where reality springs up, up to the "You," then reality sooner or later interests us no more, and this happens with the things that most draw us, even where the attraction is strongest, as in love–if we don't reach that point, in time even your wife will not last. What a Mystery! It is a question then of going to the core of reality, to its very depth, right to the "You" that makes it spring up. If we don't get to that point, sooner or later our interest fades.

Instead when I reach the point of recognizing this "You" that fascinates the "I," that reawakens it constantly, the whole of reality, right to the finest detail or the most apparently insignificant things, takes on an interest for me: "In the experience of a great love, everything becomes an event in its sphere,"[62] everything! If we don't come to recognize the "You," nothing in the end remains attractive. In other words, without religiosity, without going to the core of reality, everything is stifling, everything is disappointing, even the finest things, because what attracts me is the depth, the Mystery which is at the depth of things. If we eliminate the Mystery from reality, sooner or later reality interests us no more. It is an inexorable dynamic, but we want to understand this dynamic from within another dynamic, so as to restart constantly from there. Otherwise, everything becomes moralism, and so, sooner or later we will go home disappointed and tired. For it cannot be a moralism that reawakens my "I," it cannot be an energy of mine–I don't have it. It has to be constantly reawakened by a Presence that is before me. This is why Christ came.

So to live religiosity brings us into reality, into its core. Going to the depth of reality is what true religiosity is, that openness to totality that defines man. So we can understand the importance of Jesus' insistence on the question of religiosity: without it the "I" cannot breathe, it suffocates, and sooner or later it no longer interests us, its interest fades. Jesus does not come to make us a bit more pious, a bit more "religious" in the sense you said before (spiritual, sentimental, pietistic). No! It is reality, life that is at stake. This is the way of perceiving religiosity that the

grace of the charism brought to us. So if we don't want to lose it, we have to become more and more His children. Otherwise, not even these things will interest us in time.

Intervention. I have been living in Boston for two and a half months with my family, and I work at Harvard Medical School, probably one of the best universities in the world. It is true that living defined by the relationship with Something greater, with the Mystery, is a novelty, a revolution. When I live this relationship with the Infinite there, I find I am free from the measure that the people who work with me use on me. I am happier, and they notice it. Here it was said that to last in this position is possible because of a love that comes first, a pity that is present now. In the lesson, it was also said that this mercy and this reminder of the relationship with the Mystery are the aim of the Church. At times, though, the nearness of the Church and the Movement to my life there seems small and almost suffocating. What kind of work and responsibility does this imply for me in this situation?

Carrón. What do you do when the situation of the Church is different from what you would like? Reality educates us. You realize (and this goes for everyone, because it happens to many of us, as it has to you now, to have no one nearby, to be alone. In the U.S., often the nearest person is 300 miles away) that if it weren't possible to live what we have encountered even there, we should all go home. So what is the type of work and responsibility in this situation? You have a spectacular opportunity now to verify there what you have encountered here. How? The test of the experience you have had here–in the way you have encountered Christ in Italy–is how you live reality now.

In what way does reality come to meet you? In what way does the Mystery reach you now? Through the circumstance in which you are. The circumstance is the way the Mystery is calling you (it is called vocation, life as vocation), so that circumstance is the occasion given to you in order to recognize the Mystery. If you recognize Him, as you said in the beginning, you are free and happy. Whatever may be the circumstance, even at Harvard, with no one else beside you, nothing can stop you from recognizing Him there, and experiencing this happiness and this freedom. This is crucial for you, because then you can go anywhere,

you have all you need for living, everything is an occasion for that recognition of the Mystery that makes you free and happy.

What is your responsibility? To answer the Mystery who is calling you through the circumstances. It is the same responsibility I have every day, before every meeting, every assembly: I can sit still, waiting for it to finish, or I can be there with my whole self, trying to answer to the way the Mystery is calling me in that moment. What is the difference between you who are there and me who am here? None. You there can answer and I here can fail to answer. What does it depend on? On freedom. The point is not the condition that may be more or less favorable. Starting off from what has happened to us, we can recognize that the whole of reality speaks of Him and everything can be an occasion for relationship with Him. "Reality is Christ," St. Paul says.[63] If you answer, you will see the victory of Christ there. How? In a gladness, a freedom; and this will make you start making the Church present where you are, whatever the situation. No one stops you from answering to the Mystery there, just as no one guarantees my doing so here, before all of you. This is fascinating, because no one can think that he is spared something because the situation is favorable or unfavorable. We are all placed before the way in which the Mystery calls us, and you can answer or not answer. When you do answer, you see what happens, and what you experienced is a hope for everyone, because each one of us will be called more and more to live the faith, to live what has happened to us, in a world that seems to be going away. We could, for example, become fewer and fewer–would that situation prevent us from living what we have said? We don't depend on numbers, we don't depend on having a group beside us, because even with a group one yard away you could still fail to answer the circumstances and suffocate (many people, who have the Fraternity around them, are always ill at ease). If the Fraternity, the School of Community, the friends, etc, are not a help in my responsibility, they are of no use. When they are, even if in that moment I am alone, the companionship constitutes me. You could not be there as you are, if you were not constituted by the companionship that generated you. Your "I" is generated by this companionship, so even if you are alone, you are in company.

So, there, you can either live or suffocate. What does it depend on? On how you answer to the way in which the Mystery is call-

ing you, to this vocational circumstance in which the Lord places you. The road is a thrilling one. It is an adventure without a safety net, but it is the only way to see the victory of Christ, which does not depend on "combined forces," as many think, but on the answer to the way in which the Mystery calls me. This is our nature as laity. This is why we can live in any situation and in whatever situation the Church is in there. It is an opportunity for everyone, even for China.

Intervention. How can I know if I am taking the place of someone's freedom?

Carrón. You know if you are taking the place of someone's freedom when you see that the other is not growing, is not emerging. How can a father or mother see if they are taking their children's place? They see it from the fact that the children are more and more shriveled up, more and more frightened by the impact with reality, with less and less initiative; this means that their presence is unable to generate freedom, to awaken the person. I see that I am taking the place of others by seeing the kind of subject that is generated. When people grow, their "I" comes out, when they have more and more will to fight, to take part in life's adventure, whereas when there is someone who takes their place, they all retire to the "convent." We can run GS, for example, trying to reawaken the people in such a way that they get involved in reality, or by creating an oasis or a fort surrounded by Indians. We have to decide whether to embark on the adventure of educating or simply to satisfy the need to have a group of toy soldiers around us–the latter is of no interest to us, the former does. Educating is an adventure.

Intervention If the religious sense is something given that we find ourselves with, why do we need it to be educated?

Intervention Even other people live the acceptance of reality as something "given" naturally, in a natural way. In what does the Church become decisive and useful?

Carrón It is the same question expressed in two ways. The religious sense is something "given" that we find ourselves with, constantly reawakened by reality. So it is true that one can ask, "Why

does it need an 'education?'" It is a question in which Fr. Giussani accompanied us and clarified things, because this given that we find ourselves with is not simply something that spontaneously lasts in its original openness. We see it in children's curiosity, in their total openness; in them it is spontaneous, but with time, in adults, it slowly decays. For sure, it is given, but if it is not constantly educated, it decays, precisely because of what we said earlier. In other words, without a relationship with reality that can reawaken us constantly, our need for meaning, for totality, for satisfaction, is weakened. In fact, we know a lot of skeptical people who are less and less interested in things. So we always need an education; spontaneity is not enough.

This education is the Church's mission. It is necessary because without this constant reminder in a precise place–the Church–man's religious sense decays permanently into idolatry, that is, it closes up, affirming some detail as the meaning of the whole. The religious sense is openness to totality, but in order to maintain this original openness, it needs a presence that can go on reopening the wound of totality. This is why Christ was necessary. Without Christ, man ends up affirming a particular as Mystery, since it is not possible to keep the dizzying position of the religious man for long.

But this is not true only for the natural religious man; it goes for us, too. If we were not constantly reawakened by a presence, even "after Christ," we would succumb to idolatry like everyone else, with the name of Christ, with the name of the Church, or without the name of Christ and without the name of the Church. Man cannot help affirming "something" as the ultimate meaning of himself and reality, and if he is not constantly reawakened, he always ends up affirming a particular (it is the dynamic of the "idol"). What prevents us from decaying, from succumbing to this dynamic? Let's look at recent history. What happened to all those groups in the '60s and '70s who had, at least on the surface, this natural religious sense? Eventually, they all ended up occupying positions of power, affirming a particular ("idol"). And why are we here? Only for one factor of reality: it is called Fr. Giussani. Without a historical, real presence we would succumb to the same dynamic as the others. Let us therefore ask the Holy Spirit to keep alive amongst us the charism that has fascinated us–it is the only way for us not to succumb; otherwise our expiry date is very near.

Intervention "The irreducibility of the person in function of the kingdom of God." What does this mean for work and for running a business?

Carrón Thank you for this question. It is fundamental for us at this time to better understand the meaning of a business or a "work."

The first point is that a "work"–as Fr. Giussani always told us–is the expression of the "I." It springs from a person who says "I," who stands before reality and, seeing a need, gets to work so as to answer that need. A work is the answer to a need that appears on our life's horizon.

We immediately realize the nature of the "I" is that it does the work from his conception of the nature of the need, to which, with the work, he tries to respond. Here you begin to see the difference. All works try to respond to a need. Where is the difference? It is first of all in the way you perceive the nature of the need.

Here we see how different Jesus was. He did a work; seeing human needs, He had pity on our nothingness, and got to work. "He had compassion on them because they were all lost, like sheep without a shepherd."[64] What need did He respond to? They were sick, hungry, and afraid; they needed forgiveness. In responding to all this, Jesus understood, He realized–because of what we said here, thanks to His grasp of the mystery of the "I"–that it was not enough to respond to the hunger. His difference, the difference in His work was precisely this: He did not try to respond only to the hunger, but He tried to respond to another hunger, because "man does not live by bread alone."[65] So, after responding to the initial need of material hunger, He spoke of the Eucharist. He knew what the true human need was.

In doing a work, an "I" must not reduce the need or the answer to the need. In the way we respond to the need, in the way we generate a work, the perception of the Mystery we have and the familiarity we have with the contents of this year's Exercises can be seen. For the Exercises are not the spirituality while the work is the practical aspect, as we usually think (first comes the theology and then I answer to the need). This is the dualism that has seeped into the marrow of our bones. We need an "I" that doesn't reduce the need. But if I am not to reduce the need, if I am not to reduce an other person when I look at him, I myself must not be reduced, my "I" must not to be reduced. If I realize what my

own need is, I will not be so naïve as to think that by responding only partially to the need of the other, I am responding to him.

We have to be very careful; because now we can be very good at creating projects, we have learned the job well. Take an example of a work: AVSI can be very clever at organizing projects, and since the need is limitless, it can have the presumption to respond to this limitless need. Here the nature of the work we want to do comes out. It can happen, for example, that we manage to get the resources for carrying out projects, but then we don't have the personnel. So, when the project is in place, we ourselves are not there, the subject that has that view of the need that we spoke of is not there. So we are left with an NGO like the others. Is this what we want? It is of no interest to me. AVSI is AVSI, at an international level, for the World Bank, for the international organizations, etc., precisely because of the difference it has. If we want to keep this difference, we have to obey the Mystery, and if we can do only five projects because we only have five subjects that can do a work as we mean it, then we have to obey this. If the Mystery wants to give us a hundred thousand subjects so as to do a hundred thousand projects, we will do a hundred thousand, but as long as we have only five, we will do five; otherwise, we are presumptuous, expecting to answer a need just because we do bigger and bigger projects.

Jesus did not heal all the sick of His time. Those whom He healed, He healed as an example, so that through that people could learn that there was Someone interested in their life, who answered the whole of their need. If the Mystery wants us to respond to more needs, He will give us more people. But first we have to generate a subject capable of doing a work.

For us, works are an example. I got this perception visiting our communities, seeing our works. I would have liked you to see what I saw at Rose's Meeting Point, in Uganda. There I saw the kind of work I would like, that gives me enthusiasm. As you can imagine, Rose cannot respond to the problem of AIDS in Uganda (it is everywhere, so it is impossible to respond completely), but she can bring the hope of meaning to all the women she relates to and takes care of. I would like you all to have seen one of these women with AIDS whom we met. She has a dignity and a self-awareness that we, without AIDS, do not have, because what determined her self-awareness was not her sickness. She herself said it: "What determines the way I live is not my sick-

ness, but what has happened to me." For something like this to happen, any NGO is not enough; it needs a subject who–responding to the human need generated by AIDS–can communicate the existence of an answer to the need as a whole and reawaken hope. This is a work. So we must not succumb to the temptation of wanting to respond to everything; we have to be ready to respond when we can, but without losing our originality, which consists in presenting ourselves as "I" thanks to what has happened to us and in looking to respond to the need in the same way as we have been looked at. Without this, a work in the sense that we spoke of is impossible. There are many works, but they are not all the same. For one is astounded to see certain people at work, astounded to see that the work goes as far as to give a full answer to the need. It is quite a challenge.

Intervention. There is one thing you have said a number of times, but I cannot manage to connect it to an experience. You said that we defend ourselves from beauty and not from sacrifice, that we resist beauty. I can't see this. I can see that I resist sacrifice, and I understand that I don't see beauty, but I don't understand how we "resist" beauty. Why? Why do you say that beauty wounds us?

Carrón. This is truly mysterious; it seems so unreasonable that we are not convinced. We are not able to convince ourselves that someone, like the Pharisees, could see a beauty, a tenderness like that of Christ, a look like His, and resist. It is mysterious. I understand it is difficult for us to grasp, but this doesn't mean it doesn't happen.

I told you yesterday evening about a student of mine for whom the word "Gospels" had reawakened all the suspicion he had inside. On that occasion, I had begun to talk with him. "As you see it," I asked him, "is suspicion the correct attitude toward reality?" He answered, "Clearly it is, it is evident." "So," I said, "when your mother this morning put a cup of coffee in front of you, did you say, 'I won't drink it until I have analyzed it?'" At this, the boy was dismayed. I still remember his expression: "I've lived sixteen years with my mother!" as if I had offended him. I told him, "So there are occasions when suspicion is not reasonable! What makes the difference between your attitude to the cup of coffee and your attitude to the Gospels? For the cup of coffee, you have sixteen

years that you lived with your mother, so it is not reasonable to be suspicious; for the Gospels you have not spent even a minute on the fact that permits you to overcome your suspicion."

The most amazing thing is what happened two weeks later. I was reading a page of the Gospel in class to show what happened to those who spent a day with Jesus. So I was speaking of miracles, when Jesus went to the synagogue, then healed Peter's mother in law, then ended up healing so many. I wanted to get to the page in which Fr. Giussani said that the people who were near Jesus, for days, weeks, months, had seen these things. At a certain point I asked the class, "What if you had been among them?" The same boy replied, "I would have been careful, so as not to have been taken in." You can already decide the result of the battle before it happens! I had heard Fr. Giussani speak of it, but I never expected to be faced with it. Just the same. You ask yourself, "How is it possible for someone to resist beauty?" It seems so unreasonable! It is only because of a hatred for yourself, we could say, a diabolical hatred, that one can resist. But we have the experience of this; we are not simpletons who do not know the experience of this resistance.

When we give in to beauty, instead, we are not worried about sacrifice. When someone likes football, even if it is raining and snowing and the game is on TV, he can't resist: "Don't you see it is raining?" "What do you mean? It is not the same as being in the stadium!" Sacrifice does not become a problem when beauty is there. When does sacrifice become a problem? When love is lacking, when passion is lacking. To a wife who has this passion for her husband, doing all the housework is not an effort. It doesn't seem like a sacrifice to her; she does it all, but she doesn't feel that it is a sacrifice. When does sacrifice begin to become an enemy, become hard? When love is lacking. Then she begins to complain to the other person about everything she does; not because of what she does, but because of the love that is lacking–Martha and Mary.

Intervention. At times, it seems that the Movement is not a continuous reminder (because of the limitations of others, of the community, of the gestures, etc.). At times, this makes us have doubts about the Movement and ourselves. Can you help us to understand how, instead, the Movement is always this continuous reminder, despite all the limitations.

Carrón. We need to go and look at the chapter before the one we used yesterday in the lesson: "The human factor."[66] We have to re-read it while thinking about this question. The impassioned challenge that Fr. Giussani throws at us in that chapter is, "Judge whether all the limitations, that you see in the community are such that there is nothing to attract you anymore, that is, to bring you something good." Now, we have all had an encounter by means of people full of limitations, and their limitations have not been a problem; what they brought was much more than the limitations they had. If it weren't so, then Christ chose a method that by its nature was wrong. Perhaps what scandalizes us is not that the community has these limitations, but the method God has chosen: to use men as a way for reaching other men, choosing some so as to reach others through them. We consider this method to be mistaken. We have to decide whether it is mistaken or not. Is it true that my community, whatever it is, is so determined by limitations that there is nothing to attract me and that it doesn't bring me what I am looking for? If we don't get to the bottom of this, as Fr. Giussani taught us, so as to find the gold in the mud, we will always be blocked by the limitations of others. But the limitations of others are not an excuse for defending ourselves from what is before us.

I always use this example: if a person dear to you is gravely ill and the only doctor that understands is a hateful, despicable person, you are quite happy that there is a doctor, even a hateful one, who is able to cure that sickness of the person you love. Is it true? Tell me! We have to look at things as they are, then this is not a problem. If we go on saying it is a problem, it means that we don't love the person we say we love and we don't love the good that the doctor brings and that all his hatefulness cannot eliminate. Simple people understand this so well that they are grateful. And they are not grateful to the doctor for being hateful, but because he has cured someone, and when Christmas comes they send him a ham as a present. In my town, that's what they do. And they are not mystics, they have no need of being spiritual: they have to be people attached to reality, to the good they have before them, even though this good is in a nasty-looking box. We have to see inside this box to find out if there is gold or not. And if we don't decide at least once to get to the bottom of things, and free ourselves of our objections, then we will remain stuck forever. But be attentive, as Fr. Giussani says,

that this situation reveal what my desire for truth is, what my position is, what I desire, just as when faced with the hateful doctor, whether or not I care that about the recovery of the person I love is revealed.

Intervention. I have been taught to think that Christ is far from my humanity, and therefore from my sin. I had an image of Him as someone closed up in a castle: the castle is surrounded by a ditch and the drawbridge cannot be opened from outside, so I don't know how to get in. At times, the drawbridge is lowered and I ask, "Can it be for me?" I try to run and get in, but I see someone holier than me overtaking me.

Carrón. There is glory for everyone!

Intervention. So I hide among the hedges! Apart from the image, my question is this: Must I be worthy of Christ? How can I overcome the absolute certainty that my weakness will overcome me? What must I do to overcome this feeling that He is untouchable?

Carrón. Unfortunately, what we often think of Christianity is nothing but a reduction of Christianity to ethics. So we think of Christ as being far from us, and that we are just miserable sinners. But it is enough to read a phrase of St. Paul to see how wrong we are: "When we were sinners Christ died for us."[67] The "before" I spoke of is crucial. There is no sin that prevented Christ from becoming man, dying on the Cross and forgiving all our sins. As St. Augustine said, in the phrase I quoted, He didn't love us after, He loves us from the start. So it is false to say that Christ is far away from us. We know we are never worthy of Him, and this is what truly amazes us. We, who have this mentality, who have been educated, even in our Christian countries, in this reductive conception of Christianity, find it hard to understand.

It is the same hardship they had in the beginning. The mercy that Jesus introduces into history is so revolutionary that it seems unjust to men, as the Parable of the Prodigal Son shows. It arouses rebellion in the son who stays home. It is not possible for the father to be so tender, so loving toward the son who left home. The parables of mercy, at the beginning of Chapter

15 of Luke's Gospel, are Jesus' answer to those who were accusing Him of seeking the company of publicans and sinners. These parables are Jesus' defense of the way He relates to sinners. It aroused such a great refusal, that He had to defend His way of doing things. It is as if He were saying, "Stop it. I do this with sinners, with publicans, because God does this. I accept those you have practically cut off for life, because of the kind of life they have lived. This attitude of mine toward them seems absolutely scandalous to you." Jesus was forced to defend this; the parables are a defense of His way of relating. So Jesus says, "Blessed is he who is not scandalized at me, at this way of embracing everyone."[68] It is so different when we are scandalized, when it seems a scandal to us–it is not possible! We see it as unjust.

Then we should not be worried about our weakness, because it is inevitable that we fail, that we will always fail. But He will see to this, He is the one who "dares" to be merciful. Whatever our weakness, whatever our evil, whatever our situation, we are asked only to yield to His presence when He comes to meet us. This frees us from useless cares. The only true issue is to yield to the tenderness of Christ who comes to meet me. This is true morality. With this, Jesus has introduced a new morality, a different concept of morality. Morality is this openness, which can remain–as openness–in those who are full of sins, like the publicans, and not be in those who say they are coherent, like the Pharisees. Beware, it does not say that being more coherent is a more favorable condition for being Christians. Not necessarily! There will always be Pharisees to help us understand this.

Wednesday morning
August 29, 2007

SYNTHESIS

Julián Carrón

Who are you, Christ, who once more have had pity on our nothingness, have taken the initiative toward each one of us and become present with all your power amongst us? We could be lost like everyone else, we could have come here and perhaps nothing would have happened. What happened during these days is not self-evident; it is an event that happens now. From amongst so many lost people who live in confusion, in this moment of history, we have had the grace of seeing an event happening again before our eyes; we have seen once more the one presence of the Mystery for each one of us.

It was striking–if distraction did not prevail in us–to recite the psalm this morning with this awareness. "I will take you from the nations, I will gather you from every country and bring you back to your own land. [Not in the past, now!] I will pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols." Only He, with His power, restarts the game; with His power He frees us from our idols, into which we would necessarily, inexorably fall again, if His power were not to go on showing itself amongst us. When this happens, as we all see, it is a novelty that enters into the intimacy of our "I." These are not simple expressions: "I will give you a new heart, and put a new Spirit into you." Each of us can see what novelty has entered into his life during these days. "I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies"–even if we arrived here with a heart of stone, we now go home with a heart of flesh–"and give you a heart of

flesh," moved by what we have seen once again. "I shall put My Spirit in you, and make you keep my laws and sincerely respect my observances." How different it is to read or recite the psalm, not like something of the past, but like something that is happening now! When it happens, this is the consequence: "You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors. You shall be my people and I will be your God"[69]–precisely because God enters history, enters our life and makes Himself present before our eyes, He draws us, gathers us, brings us out of our tombs, our idols, and makes us one, makes us a people. How impressed we would be, if we didn't take everything for granted!

The "before" that we spoke of during these days goes on happening. Let's think only of what happened today, up to now–if your distraction didn't get the better of you. The Mystery has gone on taking the initiative, as those who had the fortune to hear the music experienced, as the way in which He was embracing us just now (the music is not just a decoration but, once more, the way of His initiative toward us), or those who had the fortune to say the *Angelus* as if it were the first time or, rather, with the emotion of the first time, because that event goes on happening now, because when faced with our evil, our mistakes, our distraction, "all our defilement," as the psalm says, He never tires of taking the initiative; the same goes for the Morning Prayer or the song we have just heard.

What we have lived these days is a gesture and now we have to look at the experience we have lived in this gesture. We are not a speaking agency; it would not be enough to create a people. I want to read to you, amongst the many notes I have received, a message from one of you, written after yesterday's assembly: "It is disconcerting. I am so moved that tears keep coming to my eyes with a great longing for silence." Yesterday, one of the oldest among us, with whom I stopped to talk, between one thing and another, told me emotionally, "The same experience of the old times, just the same." And before the event that happens over again, the same drama is re-proposed–that is, we can see if we have yielded to beauty or resisted it. I am not asking you to do a meditation on resistance or beauty in the abstract, but to say if, when faced with what has happened over these days–because no one can remain neutral–you have yielded or resisted. It can be seen on your face. This drama that unfolds in the intimacy of each one's heart can be seen on our face. We, too, can say, like

the boy I spoke about yesterday, "I'll take care not to be taken in, I am no fool." We could have said exactly the same.

Jesus said, "If you don't believe in Me, believe in the works I do: these works speak of My Father,"[70] of the Mystery; they make Him present. So we have to see if over these days we have experienced religiosity; not whether we know what religiosity is, but if we have had experience of religiosity, because the tombs are full of people who know what religiosity is. (Their epitaph is, "He knew the theory very well.") You only have to think about how many times you have found yourself saying "You" during these days, and you have the proof of what has happened. The point is not whether or not we have been present at Morning Prayer or at the assemblies–one could have taken part in Morning Prayer, Mass, have said the *Angelus*, been here the whole day hearing true and great things, and not said "You," that is, not managed to recognize and be moved by His presence.

One of you writes, "How impressed I was today to notice His presence through these hearts of every race and nation 'conquered.'" He was at work, stronger than any problem." The simple eye sees Him at work, finds it easier to recognize His presence through this work. These days have not been one more lesson, but a verification, a gesture in which we have experienced the drama unfolding in our life. We have not been here to learn a bit of theory to put into practice when we go home. So the problem is whether or not we have experienced what we have heard about.

This makes us understand why I gave the lesson on the chapter in *Why the Church?*. The first day's assembly made it clear that it is not enough to have the right proposal for it to be ours, part of our way of looking, the way we relate to reality, to the point of recognizing the Mystery. We have seen how hard it is for us to recognize the Mystery in reality, we have seen with our eyes, touched with our hands; we have seen the struggle. We need to go back over the assemblies to see what happened, because there it was evident that, without a continuous reminder (as we said during the lesson) and without correction, the lesson of the Exercises will never become ours. We need a place where we are educated and accompanied to recognize the Mystery, where each of us can experience the impact of a Presence that facilitates this recognition.

The Mystery entered into history as a factor of reality so that men could become capable of familiarity with Him. The Mys-

tery was already there, He did not begin to exist when He entered into history. So why did He enter as a factor of reality, as a historical factor? Because if He had not entered into history, the Mystery–who was there already, because the world and men already existed–would have remained far off. It is the same for us today, just the same: if the Mystery does not enter into our history as a factor of reality, an ultimate familiarity with the Mystery is impossible for us; education to the religious sense is impossible. We have to acknowledge, then, that we need a historical presence to accompany us, to bring us to recognize the Mystery, to establish in us a struggle against every reduction, against every attempt of ours to stop short at appearances, to substitute the Mystery with idols of any kind.

We need presences that facilitate this recognition. Only those who let themselves be accompanied and generated in this way will be able to accompany and generate others. "Only those who are generated can generate."[71] So we can get out of the dilemma in which we often find ourselves (as we said in the assembly yesterday), between interventionism and abstention–an interventionism that eliminates the other or, since we don't know how to do otherwise, abstention. We don't see, we cannot imagine another way of not taking the person's place except retiring. The Mystery has had more imagination than us: He introduced a real presence which, by asserting itself so impressively, made it possible for the "I" to emerge. Without this, the "I" would not have emerged. Presences are needed. And only if we let ourselves be generated first–become responsible–can we accompany others. That is, first we must acknowledge that we need to be generated. In order to generate, we have to accept that we are needy.

We can generate, we can lead, we can accompany others, only if we have the courage to recognize the Mystery that comes to meet us in the sign. We have not to give instructions for use: we have to take the risk, we need to have trust that our leadership lies in following the sign, to accompany in completing the course of the sign of the Mystery. This is education–not explaining reality, but introducing people to reality, and introducing to reality is introducing to its mystery, introducing to the core of reality, the ultimate mystery of reality.

Only one who is ready to follow the sign up to the Mystery can educate. Education is a frightening thing. It is not the one who explains life, "watching the bulls from the terraces", who gives

you instructions for use, who educates you, but the one who lives before you following the way through which the Mystery becomes present in reality–he can introduce you to reality because he himself is following the Mystery in the sign. This is education, the Church's educational function, in continuation with Christ's educational function–educating the religious sense, educating to religiosity, that is, educating to enter into reality right down to its source, the Mystery. Only someone who lives this religiosity can educate, one who penetrates down beyond appearances to reach the "You." Only someone who lives this can educate, can bring out the "I," because the "I" does not emerge through instructions for use, but only before the Mystery. Who has a capacity to fascinate capable of winning over our whole "I" if not the Mystery? Who corresponds to us if not the Mystery? So if there is no one to accompany me and put me in relationship with the Mystery, my "I" does not emerge. So, when we take someone's place, we do not educate–we produce toy soldiers, which is what instructions for use can produce, but we do not allow the "I" to come out. Only the Mystery is able to bring out the "I" in its entirety.

We do not accompany people by managing them, like "mediators" in their relationship with the Mystery. A "mediator" wants to spare you the dizziness that the Mystery produces. ("I'll see to it." "No, thanks.") He thinks he has a direct line to the Mystery, that he knows what the Mystery wants from you. No! The "I" is direct relationship with the Mystery. What Fr. Giussani says seems little, but it is crucial. A mediator thinks he knows what the Mystery has in store for you, but someone who would spare you the Mystery is cheating you–it is an attempt at possession. There is only one mediator: Christ. What is the meaning of Christ as a figure? Christ is the mediator, because He lived in the first person His relationship with the Mystery, with the Father, and when someone tried to draw Him away from this, like Peter, He sent him to blazes: "Go away from me."[72] Christ generated the disciples not because He explained things to them, but because He lived His unique, personal relationship with the Mystery in the first person, up to the Cross, up to the last instant. His problem was not to organize the Church, but to live the Father's will, and in this way He generated the Church, He generated the people, and He generates us.

Our problem is not the management or the organization of our

people; my problem and your problem is to live! Only someone who is alive can generate a people, can be truly a go-between in the direct relationship with the Mystery, because he puts the other in relationship with Him. Fr. Giussani said something I have never forgotten: "Jesus did not tie people to Himself, but to the Father."[73] And, paradoxically, this is what the Pope said about Fr. Giussani at his funeral: "He did not bind people to himself, but to Christ, and so he generated a people."[74] What we have seen is the presence of Christ today through the figure of Fr. Giussani, who, precisely because he lived the relationship with the Mystery so intensely, educated us tenaciously to have no other aim in life but this.

We can generate–in the image of Christ, in following Fr. Giussani–if we are the first to follow, so that it will be easier for us to recognize the Mystery. The method cannot be other than following someone who is following, looking at someone who is looking, recognizing among us the people who live like this, those whom the Lord gives us in order to facilitate our journey, in order to help us, to educate us in religiosity, even though they may be the last to arrive. It is not a problem of roles, but a problem of truth: only those who live a true relationship with reality can educate us.

Now precisely because Christ is the sign of signs and He introduces us to the core of reality, everything–in relationship with Him–becomes a sign, everything can be recognized for what it is, that is to say, a sign. Paraphrasing Romano Guardini, we can say that in the history of a great love, everything becomes a sign. So every circumstance is the way in which the Mystery reaches me, calls me to Him. We are all like the young doctor who is at Harvard, alone, before the Mystery who is calling to him through that circumstance. None of us, even if we are surrounded by friends, is spared this. For we could even have been here during these days and not have said "You" to Christ, to the Mystery. No one spares us the drama of this recognition. Even in the place that helps me most, no one can take my place and say "You" for me. Christ can make it easier for me, can show Himself in all His fullness, with all His power, with all the attraction of His beauty, but He doesn't spare me this "You." In this, we are all equal, whatever be our circumstances.

Living religiosity is the only thing that generates true friendship, because friendship is going together toward destiny, going

together toward the Mystery. This is the only true friendship, the only one that lasts; the rest are relationships of convenience. All other types of relationship, apart from this, are political. We have to decide whether we want to establish political relationships of convenience or to be truly friends. Do we want to play games with each other, or accompany each other to destiny?

We have all understood clearly the instruments the Lord has given us in this history for our education. But, be careful, the School of Community–which is the first instrument–doesn't become ours because we carry it around under our arm, or because we keep it on our night table, or because we have registered for it. It becomes ours if it becomes a companionship, an introduction to reality; it is part of that "before" with which the Mystery accompanies me. And the proof of what it tells me is not in my thoughts, but in reality. The School of Community is for living, not for making a discourse about. It is given to me not as a point of departure for my thoughts, but so as to introduce me into reality. What is communicated in the School of Community is the experience of someone who has lived what we are speaking of and therefore introduces us to reality. And it is in the verification that I am more and more fascinated by this history that has taken hold of me, and I am more and more grateful for having encountered such a road, such a man. So you give space for School of Community, even in silence. If you have no time for this, ask yourself where your heart is. The same goes for charitable work, as the way in which we are introduced to the mystery of Being, which is charity.

The year we have ahead is given to us so that we can see Christ even more at work, if we are ready. Let us together ask Our Lady for this readiness. "A responsible," says Fr. Giussani, in *Certain of A Few Great Things*, "is the most obedient person that exists." "We betray our friends if *we here* do not live what we have said." "Let's go away, as responsibles, and we will have less responsibility."[75] Let us ask Our Lady to give us the readiness to follow the Mystery through the way He is calling us.

Notes

[1] Jacopone da Todi, «Como l'anima se lamenta con Dio de la carità superardente in lei infusa», Lauda XC, in *Le Laude*, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze 1989, p. 313.
[2] L. Giussani, "In the Great Sea of Our Usual Life, a Continuous Newness," *Traces* No. 6–Vol. 9 2007, p. 6.
[3] *Mt*10:30.
[4] 1*Jn* 4:19.
[5] *Eph* 1:3-4.
[6] *Eph* 1:18-19.
[7] St. Augustine, *Sermons On St. John's Gospel,* 110,6.
[8] L. Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose (1979-1981) [*Certain of a Few Great Things*]*, Bur, Milano 2007, p. 9.
[9] L. Giussani, "In the Great Sea of Our Usual Life, a Continuous Newness," op. cit., p. 1.
[10] "Christ, in His Beauty Draws Me to Him," Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Rimini 2007.
[11] *Ibid.,* p. 5.
[12] *Mt* 9:26.
[13] "Christ, in His Beauty Draws Me to Him", op. cit., p. 37.
[14] *Mt* 11:3-6.
[15] Saturninus Salustius Secundus, *De diis et mundo*, 2,1.
[16] A. Mascagni, *Il mio volto [My face]*in *Canti*, Milano 2002, p. 203.
[17] L. Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose (1979-1981)*, op. cit., p. 220.
[18] L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, Mc Gill-Queens University Press, 1997 p. 94.
[19] "Christ, in His Beauty Draws Me to Him", op. cit., p. 8.
[20] Cf. L. Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose (1979-1981)*, op. cit., p. 394.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 395.
[22] "Christ, in His Beauty Draws Me to Him," op. cit., p. 53.
[23] *Jer* 31:3.
[24] *Lk* 1:48.
[25] L. Giussani, "Christ's Conception of Life" in *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit., pp. 80-98.
[26] Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, art. 1.
[27] Cf. *Mk* 8:36; *Lk* 9:25.
[28] Cf. *Jn* 6:67.
[29] Cf. L. Giussani "Familiarity with Christ," *Traces* No. 2–Vol. 9 2007, p. 2.
[30] Cf. L. Giussani, "How the Ultimate Questions Arise: The Way of the Religious Sense" in *The Religious Sense,* Mc Gill-Queens University Press, 1997.
[31] Cf. "Christ, in His Beauty Draws Me to Him," op. cit., p. 33.
[32] 1*Cor* 13:3.
[33] Seneca, *De beneficiis*, VI 3.
[34] Cf. *Gen* 18:1-8.
[35] Cf. *Lk* 10:38-42.
[36] *Mt* 28:20.
[37] L. Giussani, "A Mission of the Church Towards Earthly Man" in *Why the Church?,* Mc Gill-Queens University Press, 2001, pp. 147-162.
[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.
[39] *Ibid.,* p. 148.
[40] *Ivi.*

[41] *Ivi.*
[42] Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.
[43] L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, op. cit., p. 148.
[44] *Ivi.*
[45] Cf. L. Giussani, "Christ's conception of life," op. cit.
[46] L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, op. cit., p. 148.
[47] *Ibid*., p. 150.
[48] *Ivi.*
[49] *Ibid.,* p. 153.
[50] *Ivi.*
[51] *Mk* 10:29-30.
[52] L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, op. cit., p. 154.
[53] *Ivi.*
[54] *Ibid*., p. 155.
[55] *Ivi.*
[56] *Lk* 12:13-15.
[57] L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, op. cit., p. 157.
[58] *Ibid*., p. 158.
[59] *Ibid*., pp. 158-159.
[60] *Ibid*, p. 162.
[61] Cf. L. Giussani in "Charism and History," *Traces* No 2–Vol. 3 2001, p.vi.
[62] Cf. R. Guardini, *L'essenza del cristianesimo [*The Essence of Christianity*],* Morcelliana, Brescia 1980, p. 12.
[63] Cf. *Col* 2:17.
[64] Cf. *Mt* 9:36.
[65] Cf. *Mt* 4:4., *Lk* 4:4.
[66] L. Giussani, "The Human Factor" in *Why the Church?* , op. cit., p. 123 ff.
[67] Cf. *Rom* 5:6.
[68] Cf. *Mt* 11:6.
[69] Morning prayer, Wednesday, *The Book of Hours.*
[70] Cf. *Jn* 14:11.
[71] L. Giussani, "Nessuno genera se non è generato" [No One Generates Unless He is Generated] *Tracce*, No 6 giugno 1997, p.vi.
[72] Cf. *Mt* 16:23; *Mk* 8:33.
[73] Cf. L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo*, Rizzoli, Milano 1998, pp. 53-56.
[74] Cf. J. Ratzinger, "In Love with *Christ.* In an Encounter, the *Road*," *Traces* No. 3–Vol. 7 2005, p. 12.
[75] L. Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose (1979-1981)*, op. cit., p. 90.

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