

An abstract painting in the background of the cover. It depicts several white racing shells on a dark, turbulent sea. The rowers are rendered in shades of blue and brown, with their oars dipping into the water. The sky is a mix of dark, moody colors like grey, blue, and green, suggesting a storm or a dramatic atmosphere. The overall style is expressive and textured, with visible brushstrokes.

# EXPERIENCE: THE INSTRUMENT FOR A HUMAN JOURNEY

International Assembly of Responsibles  
of Communion and Liberation

LA THUILE, ITALY, AUGUST 2009

TRACES

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**5TRACES**

In cover: Vasilij Kandinskij, *The Lake*, (1910), Tret'jakov Gallery, Moscow

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## INTRODUCTION | JULIÁN CARRÓN

*August 18, 2009. Tuesday evening*

At the beginning of a gesture like the one we are about to start, the International Assembly of Responsibles, there is nothing we need as much as the power of the Holy Spirit, that energy of Christ, the only one able to change, to introduce newness into our bones, in every fiber of our being.

We all know how needy we are for this energy: the more we're aware of the disproportion of our resources, the more we're aware that we need something greater than our intentions and our goodwill, and for this reason there wells up inside us this cry to the Holy Spirit, that the energy of Christ may enter our life and open us to the grace the Lord wants to give us in these days.

### *Come Holy Spirit*

Reflecting on the itinerary we've done this year and the content of the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises in order to identify the most pressing need I feel for all of us, for the Movement at all levels, and looking at the situation in which we find ourselves, in which we are called to live the faith, the cultural context in which we are immersed, the word that comes to mind is "confusion." We understood something of the origin of this confusion when we said, at the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises, that this is the consequence of that collapse of "the ancient certainties" that always leads to bewilderment.<sup>1</sup> How often we feel lost, without knowing how to face certain things or how to live in the face of certain situations!

Only if we are able to help each other understand this situation and to respond to the urgent need it provokes in us can we leave this gathering with a bit more clarity, so we can live better all that

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<sup>1</sup> J. Carrón, "From Faith the Method," Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, 2009, supplement to *Traces*, Vol. 11, No. 6, 2009, p. 18.

life asks us to face, so we can also contribute to the good of our brothers and sisters. Faced with this situation, we all realize that it's no longer enough, as it's not enough for so many of our brothers and sisters, to repeat a discourse, no matter how correct. To use an expression of Fr. Giussani's, the repetition of "a correct and clean discourse" is no longer enough. He said it years ago: "A correct and clean discourse is passed on, some rules on how to be Christians and men. But without love, without the acknowledgment of the vivifying Mystery, the individual fades away and dies. Our hope, the salvation of Christ, cannot be something we've read and know how to parrot back well. A more or less edifying or moralistic discourse, then, is what the announcement is often reduced to."<sup>2</sup>

We know this too. It's not enough for us to know what marriage is, for it to thrive; it isn't enough for us to know what work is, for it not to become a tomb; it doesn't suffice for us to know that circumstances are an opportunity, for them not to become a defeat. It's no longer enough for us, and we know it. This dualism doesn't respond to our true need! We've repeated the right thing so many times, but this doesn't keep us on our feet, doesn't let us fill our lungs and breathe deeply.

We need to see before us people who, in their way of addressing life, in their way of facing reality, of acting before the provocations of life, introduce a light, a clarity in the midst of the confusion in the way they live their relationships, work, and circumstances. It is there, in the way of facing daily challenges, that we verify whether we have something that helps us to live (that gives us a more intense gusto in living) or if we are disarmed like the others. We need people who incarnate in their lives a real possibility for living the human life of men and women today. When we find ourselves before some of these people, it's as if this bewilderment, this confusion, begins to be defeated: these people begin to keep us company even if they live far away. They truly become real companions.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Giussani, *Un caffè in compagnia. Conversazioni sul presente e sul destino* [A Coffee in Company. Conversations on the Present and on Destiny], Milan, Rizzoli 2004, pp. 173-174.

The reason is one that Fr. Giussani has always taught us and that he repeated in one of his last interviews, in *Corriere della Sera* on his last birthday: “Firstly, we have to correct the usual conception of faith. The whole new beginning of a Christian experience—and therefore of every relationship—is not generated by a cultural point of view, as if it were a discourse to be applied to things, but it happens precisely as an experience [as an experience: these are the people who in these years we’ve called witnesses]. ... The beginning of faith is not an abstract culture but something that precedes this: an event. Faith is taking note of something that has happened and continues to happen, of something new from which everything starts off, really. It is a life and not a discourse about life...”<sup>3</sup> It is a life we see lived in front of us, that we see breathe in front of us, in circumstances, in the normal weft and woof of existence.

But the witness is not enough. The witness shows us a real, more human possibility of living in the circumstances to which we are called and, for this reason, strikes us; but it’s not enough, because each of us (I, you) needs it to happen in our own life, in the circumstances that we are forced to face; that is, we need to experience personally what the witness shows—so that it may become mine! We need evidence in our own existence, because each of us has to personally face circumstances, life, and needs to see there that it can be lived in another way, that the confusion can be defeated, that death isn’t the destiny of every circumstance. Otherwise, we shipwreck in the circumstances and use Fr. Giussani’s sentences as an epitaph for our tomb. I’ve seen it, for example, in the way so many have talked about a particular passage from the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises (“The circumstances through which God has us pass are an essential and not a secondary factor of our vocation, of the mission to which He calls us”<sup>4</sup>): everybody repeats it, but how often have you seen and heard documented

<sup>3</sup> Interview by G.G. Vecchi, “God’s Commitment with Man’s Brutal Loneliness,” reprinted in *Traces*, Vol. 6, No. 10, 2004, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> L. Giussani, *L’uomo e il suo destino* [*Man and His Destiny*], Marietti, Genoa 1999, p. 63.

that circumstances were truly the essential factor of the growth of the “I,” of the possibility for breathing room in life (and not only a lament, the tomb on which you put the epitaph of the sentence)? If we don’t experience this, we’ll become increasingly skeptical. Instead, I have to be able to see in my experience the evidence of the truth; the experience of the witness isn’t enough. I have to experience it myself; I need it to happen to me.

I was struck, re-reading a few pages from *Certain of a Few Great Things* (1979-1981), one of the books of the équipes [leadership work meetings] we’ve published in recent years, by Fr. Giussani’s insistence on this even back in 1980, when he said that if I intuit or have a presentiment of something as a value, through the testimony of another, and I don’t verify it, sooner or later I’ll leave; if I don’t see it happening in me, if I don’t commit to verifying it, to really experiencing it, sooner or later it won’t interest me. He insisted on one of the fundamental concerns, that is, that life truly become a journey and that everything serve this certainty, to reach an increasing certainty that makes life grow: “Somebody who reaches sixty [years old] can have tried all that can be tried, but won’t necessarily be an ‘experienced’ person; experience is the capacity to compare against the ideal. Otherwise, you don’t experience anything; you have the characteristic attitude of so many old people, full of emptiness, of nothingness.”<sup>5</sup>

My desire for myself and for each of you is that we don’t end up old people full of emptiness. The only possibility is to experience what we talk about, so that life doesn’t pass by in vain. Listen to the correction Fr. Giussani made even back in 1980: “Up until now we’ve said, ‘From experience to judgment.’ I propose substituting this formula with the slogan, ‘Let’s pass from doing the Movement to the experience of the Movement.’ To say, ‘Let’s pass from doing the Movement to the experience’ coincides with the whole discourse of personalization. That doing the Movement should become my and your experience [his constant yearning is

<sup>5</sup> L. Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose (1979-1981)* [*Certain of a Few Great Things*], Bur, Milan, 2007, p. 148.

that it become ours, that it become mine and yours!]: the key to this passage is judgment. In fact, how does this passage happen? Providing all that we do with the ideal comparison, that is, with a judgment. [...] Because judgment turns something that I do into an experience. [...] What does it mean to judge? It means comparing what you do with the acknowledged ideal. It's investing what you do with the ideal, with the ideal awareness. How does this happen? It happens when the ideal is like the specific weight of a metal. It's a weight, a memory, a gusto you have inside when you kiss a girl or when you eye something in the supermarket you can steal, when you return home and your father and your mother are arguing, or when you only have ten days left until your exam and you have to spend your whole day over your books. [...] You have to follow people who are alive. Who are these people? Those who, knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously, have within them this weight [this gusto]."<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this year, the School of Community, the vicissitudes we've had to face, the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises, have been like a specific weight for us, like the gusto that has been communicated to us: what experience have we had of this? We're here to help each other judge, to understand more, to witness to each other about this experience, so that this gusto may increase, to defeat together this confusion, not adding word to word, but as testimony to this victory, to this gusto that Christ introduces into life. Because unless this truly becomes experience, we won't grow in the certainty of the faith; faith won't become for us that knowledge verified in experience that introduces a newness into whatever we're living.

Therefore, these days are days of work, of personal work, of work among friends, of work together. It would be a pity to waste it. Our time is all work and all free time, because we're here so that what we say to each other will become increasingly ours.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.



*August 20, 2009. Thursday morning*

## 1. THE REDUCTION OF EXPERIENCE

What impressive help the Church gives each of us in every moment! If we were only present to what happens, to what we say, we would learn another way of relating to reality, another gaze on experience, because all the difficulties that have emerged, that now we will look in the face, are challenged by the testimony that the prophets have given in history, that the Church proposes to us every morning in order to open our eyes wide to look at reality as it is.

Look—I don’t know if you realized it—when we read the second song of the Prophet Hosea this morning, we said, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the farther they went from me, sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms [this is what interested me: not that they aren’t good, not that they don’t adhere]; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks; Yet, though I stooped to feed my child, they did not know that I was their healer [it’s not that they weren’t in front of the facts, as we are in front of the facts, but that they didn’t understand that He was caring for them]<sup>7</sup>. But: “My people is hard to convert: [that is, they didn’t submit reason to experience, not understanding]: called to look on high, no one raises his gaze.” It is if they were trapped and nobody raised his gaze to grasp all that lay in what they were experiencing. Not raising their gaze, they don’t see well, don’t enter fully into what they are living, don’t understand, and therefore the ultimate reality remains extraneous to them; the ultimate depth that makes

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<sup>7</sup> *Hos.11:1-4.*

itself present in those gestures remains unknown. What is this ultimate depth? “How could I give you up, O Ephraim, or deliver you up, O Israel? How could I treat you as Admah, or make you like Zeboiim? My heart is overwhelmed, my pity is stirred.”<sup>8</sup> The ultimate depth of the experience they have is this, but they don’t comprehend that He is their healer.

If we take Adriana Mascagni’s song, it’s the same. We all got up this morning; we all can compare what happened between our getting up and our arriving here and the experience of her song. “My God, I look at myself and I discover that I have no face; I look into my depths and see endless darkness. Only when I realize that You exist...”<sup>9</sup> Not that He doesn’t exist—He exists - but in the way we look at each other there isn’t the awareness—I don’t realize that you exist, and since I lack this, I’m not reborn. Since I don’t hear the voice again, I’m not reborn. The sign is that I am reborn. The test that shows it isn’t just a “pious” thing for me, but something real, is that I am reborn.

This is just to give you a couple of examples of how the Liturgy or the songs we sing challenge us constantly. However, it’s as if they aren’t able to penetrate the crust with which we’ve already reduced them. Because the “I” that reads or sings is already reduced; it’s already in a relationship with reality that blocks it from grasping the full magnitude of what exists!

So then, the question is: how can we help each other understand all there is in experience so that our “I” is reborn? Because, my friends, the goal is not intellectual discourses; the goal of this true gaze on everything, on reality, is that I be reborn.

The trouble is that we truly struggle with having experience (one of the words most used by us, and least understood). We all use the word “experience,” but—together with the word “correspondence”—we err in how we use it, and we have to help each other dig down to the source of the reductions so that we can begin to be aware

<sup>8</sup> *Hos.11:7-8.*

<sup>9</sup> A. Mascagni, *Il mio volto [My Face]*, in *Canti [Songs]*, Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2002, p. 203.

of them. In order to understand it, we have to start out from experience, to help each other understand why we reduce it, why we use it badly, looking at what happens. Otherwise, confusion prevails, and the confusion we live in shows itself precisely in how we reduce experience. This is a grave reduction, as Fr. Giussani always reminded us, because it weakens or thwarts the fundamental method of human development, because experience is the road of the development of the person. In other words, experience is the instrument we have in our hands for our development, for our growth; but if we use it badly or reduce it, everything that happens in life is useless and sterile, doesn't help, doesn't increase our "I," doesn't develop our person. As we said in the Introduction: you can grow old and empty, even having lived many things, because you haven't had experiences.

I touched this close up—I've told this story many times—when I was a high school teacher. In the morning in class, the students filled the blackboard with questions; and in the evening, when I received adults by appointment, I still remember one fellow who we could define as a "man of experience," in quotation marks, because he had traveled the world. He hadn't remained closed up in the kitchen his whole life; he'd done all sorts of things. But I was stunned because he had exactly the same questions as the kids, as if nothing had happened in his life. The kids had their whole life before them; the other fellow, instead, was there, after having lived many things, as if everything was useless in answering the questions of existence. Do you see? Fr. Giussani wasn't talking in the abstract, because you find his expressions in the concrete faces of people who are truly lost after years of intensely lived experiences. Why? Because of a reduction of experience: if the method of experience is weakened, everything that happens is of no use; confusion and bewilderment grow or, worse still, our heads are filled with the contents imposed by the powers that be. "If the definition of life's most important words is determined by this common mentality, then this ensures our total slavery, our

complete alienation.”<sup>10</sup> We’re not exempt from this risk.

What are the reductions of experience? We’ve seen it these days; we say it almost spontaneously, almost without an adequate awareness. So often for us, experience is only something intellectual, and judgment something artificial, and when someone invites us to make a journey, as Fr. Giussani does, we feel it to be even more artificial, or we reduce it simply to the impact that things provoke in us: we recount facts, but everything remains there, and afterwards, nothing is left. This is because, generally, even among us, experience is identified as the sum of the “impacts,” the quantity of moments lived, the shocks or the “impressions had” that are all real—not that they aren’t real—we’re speaking about real things and for this reason so many times we think we’re journeying the road that we propose to each other, because nobody is drawing abstractions; they’re telling real facts. We’ve made some progress on this, thanks be to God, but we’re still there! Or we are with our subjective emotions, the “sentimental effect.”<sup>11</sup> For us, experience, or what we call experience, is either blind (experience as a synonym of mere feeling, trying) and mechanical (mere sensations without intelligence, without judgment: empirical reductions) or it is subjective in the worst sense of the word, that is, something sentimental, the subjective opposed to the objective, as if we said, “I feel that...” and this becomes the measure of what happens to us (subjectivist reduction: the reason “modernism” accuses or “suspects” Christianity): *tot capita tot sententiae*. Thus, today we’re as saturated with emotions as we are poor in experience. The incomprehension of the word “experience” is evident in the way we usually contrast it with “judgment” or “knowledge”—where one exists, the other doesn’t. They’re alternatives. It’s the clearest sign that we’re confused about both terms.

For this reason, when we reduce experience to this sort of impact or mechanical shock, then judgment seems to be something

<sup>10</sup> L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006, p.106.

intellectual, almost tacked on. Precisely because of this, we often feel the judgment as something forced, like something that we impose upon reality, that we create. Look at how many times we ask ourselves why we have to reach the point of saying Christ—we feel Him as something extraneous. We feel Him to be so external to experience that it seems like we’re making a leap in the dark, so much does He seem added on, not belonging to the experience we have. He becomes a strained addition! And thus something intellectual, added like a hat to the “experience,” in quotation marks, that we have.

We have before us these two reductions, that of empiricism and that of intellectualism: experience reduced to empiricism and judgment reduced to intellectualism. An intellectual conception of knowledge and of judgment is the other face of an empirical-sentimental conception of experience. Intellectualism and empiricism always go hand in hand.

In a contribution at a gathering of responsables, one of us observed that judgment seems like a strained addition to us; it seems that having to judge beautiful things, intense things, ruins the enchantment of what we’re living; to some degree it takes the poetry out of experience, ruins it. Therefore, when things have been interesting, beautiful, and persuasive, what need is there to judge them? We enjoyed them. Therefore, he said, very often in instigating each other to judge we seem like party-poopers. After all, we’re living something beautiful—why should we have to judge it too? It seems like we’re carrying out an artificial and toilsome operation, going so far as to excavate to the origin of what has happened to us.

## 2. JUDGMENT AS THE REPERCUSSION OF BEING

Instead, in a certain way, for Fr. Giussani, things are simpler and more united, because for him (one of the things that struck me many years ago, and that I’ve repeated many times), judgment isn’t something added; rather, it’s the repercussion of being [translator’s note: like the kickback or recoil when shooting a gun]. Judgment

isn't something added on; it's contemporaneous to the repercussion. It's not that first the mountains give you a certain impression and then you have to reflect to be able to say they're beautiful. In these days here, have any of you done this mental operation? Nobody. What you've said, what you've discovered yourself saying, is: "How beautiful the mountains are!" "What a gorgeous day!" Right? Each of you can compare against the experience you've had. That is: judgment, saying that the mountains are beautiful (but this also holds for ugly or burdensome or painful things) isn't an artificial mental operation; it's contemporaneous. We grasp beauty in the very act of knowing, because reality makes itself transparent in experience and, therefore, since it makes itself transparent, it makes the "I" capable of acknowledging it because, in this repercussion of being, reality, beauty makes my "I" come forth in such a way that I can acknowledge it. It's not that first I feel the impact and then I have to go and find someone who tells me that the mountains are beautiful. During the hike today, did any of you go to the guide after the impact of the mountains, and ask if they were beautiful or not? We say things that are ludicrous! In the very nature of the experience, there's this contemporaneousness, so much so that if I don't reach the point of formulating this judgment, I don't account for all I'm living in that moment. If I don't say, "They're beautiful," I don't say all the experience I'm having, as if I don't say, "It's ugly," in the face of something ugly, I don't express all the experience of repulsion that my "I" is having. Judgment isn't tacked on. Instead, it's loyalty to the experience I have (think of how the way we sing when we're together is correspondent).

"What characterizes experience is our *understanding* something, discovering its meaning. To have an experience means to comprehend the meaning of something."<sup>12</sup> When do I understand them? When I account for all the factors implicated in the experience. So when we say that it's artificial, we say something that's against experience. In order to learn, we need to

<sup>12</sup> L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001, pp. 98-99.

look at this elementary experience we have before reality, before the mountains, before the songs. The artificiality lies in us, the ones who don't truly realize what's happening when we have an experience. We're the ones who are disloyal, in how we talk about the experience we have in what we're truly living. Excuse me, before these mountains, is it artificial to say they're beautiful? Is it something added on? Is it artificial to feel the repercussion and all that it unleashes in us? No. What's artificial is the act of stopping there.

Someone told me that during a hike on a CLU vacation, a fellow there on the trail saw the line of kids climbing in silence and asked, "Who are you?" "We're university students. We're here on vacation." "No, no, no, no: who are you?" "We're here in the Aosta Valley..." "No, no, no: who are you?" "We're members of Communion and Liberation." "Ah! It's impressive to see you hike up the mountain in silence!" Was it artificial for that fellow to continue asking? Did someone tell him he had to make that journey of questioning? Did someone explain to him that there's no experience if you don't reach the point of making a judgment? No. He couldn't stop. It would've been artificial to stop and not ask anything else.

What is this experience? The very rapid comparison of what we feel with the exigencies that constitute our heart; and the more beautiful or the uglier what we see is, the easier the judgment is, the faster all the exigencies come forth, and we make this comparison very rapidly; the more the human is present, the less we are stones, the easier it is to make this very rapid comparison. It's simple. Fr. Giussani, in his genius, describes for us a journey, a road full of reasonableness and at the same time of a disarming simplicity; no strange itineraries are needed. It's normal for anybody, even for someone who's observing some kids on a hike. It is this very rapid comparison with what we run into that brings forth all the exigencies of the heart with all its curiosity and that leads us to judgment.

It's as if Fr. Giussani used a slow motion camera to help us

realize all the factors implicated in the experience we have so rapidly, so quickly that we don't realize things, to the point that we then reduce it, because the repercussion of something awakens all our exigencies in such a way that with these exigencies we can immediately judge what we have before us; but it's so quick that we don't realize everything that's there. For this reason, as we said at the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises, the "I" engaged with what it feels makes the judgment emerge with this simplicity. As he always taught us, we have to look at the immediacy of experience in order to have present all the factors. Otherwise, according to the latest fashion, the latest slogan, we mistake one factor for another: after the "judgment" there should be "contemporaneity," then "correspondence"—each time a word, but without grasping the whole together. The genius of Fr. Giussani is that instead of explaining to us how the words go together, he makes us start out from experience, where everything is united! We don't have to try to put them together; they're already together! It's simpler than what we do. The more these exigencies come forth in the face of reality, the more you realize that God is the ultimate implication of human experience (religiosity as the inevitable dimension of authentic experience).

### 3. THE TRAJECTORY OF EXPERIENCE

So then, it's inevitable that we should go back to what will always be the masterpiece text on experience, the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, because there we have the complete description of what human experience is, where experience is not reduced to the first impact; the chapter documents that the first impact is the first step of a road, of a trajectory, and that in order to explain that first impact, you have to reach what is implicated in that impact, that is, God, the You. But if this is experience, my friends, let's ask ourselves: how often do we truly have an experience? We can all look at the past month, the past week, and see how often we've truly experienced something, how many times we've become conscious of reality according to all the



factors involved in that initial impact. In this way, we realize how we reduce experience (what we call experience) so that, in the end, there isn't any knowledge; we don't reach knowledge. We can get close, but always in the end it's like a leap into the void: it's not knowledge, and therefore it becomes an act of the will, something tacked on. It feels strained, forced. There, the dualism starts: you see that the "I" is not reborn, that is, that I don't acquire a true knowledge. I don't judge. For this reason, in order to understand the entire weight of the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, an "I" is needed that is capable of acknowledging in the repercussion of reality all that exists, because this chapter is the full explanation of experience. For Fr. Giussani to say, "I am" with full awareness means saying, "I am made." "So I do not consciously say 'I am,' in a sense that captures my entire stature as a human being if I do not mean 'I am made'"<sup>13</sup>—that is, I implicate God. "Therefore, knowledge isn't characterized by an accumulation of impacts, impressions, emotions, but by an acquisition of knowledge, by an understanding of meaning." Without an increase of awareness, of knowledge of things and of yourself, you can't say you've had an experience. "This tendency to separate and isolate gives all sorts of typical and inadequate connotations to the word experience, among which [look: in the list that follows there's a place for all of us!] are an immediate reaction to things, the multiplication of links through the mere proliferation of initiatives, a sudden attraction or disgust for the new, an insistence on our own designs or plans, insisting on memories of the past that have no value in the present, or even referring to a particular event in order to block aspirations or stunt ideals."<sup>14</sup> It's like Fr. Giussani took a photograph, not to beat us over the head, but to help us learn. I want to dig deep to the guts of the place where we get stuck, because if we don't understand it, we don't make a human journey, and in the end we use the words with the meaning, not of the experience we have, but of the powers that be.

<sup>13</sup> L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op. cit., p. 129.

“Without the capacity for evaluating, man cannot have any *experience* at all [if there truly isn’t knowledge, I don’t have an experience]. . . . Experience certainly means ‘trying’ something, but primarily it also coincides with a judgment we make about what we try.”<sup>15</sup> Look, we’ve repeated these lines many times, but we still have a great deal to learn. Again, in *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, he reminds us how “[a]s in any authentic experience, but above all in the Christian experience, it is patently clear that our self-awareness and critical capacity (the capacity to verify!) are engaged.”<sup>16</sup> Hardly pure mechanism! It is our self-awareness.

#### 4. THE TEST OF EXPERIENCE: REALIZING THAT WE GROW

“Experience” means trying, going through or feeling something, and judging it according to the original and objective criteria immanent in our human structure (as we said in the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises). Yesterday, we asked how you can see that a judgment has been made, that is, that the passage from trying or feeling or going through something to experience has happened. What indicates that I’ve truly had an experience? What is the test that an experience has taken place? Look at what Fr. Giussani says: the test of experience is that it makes me grow. “There was a time when the person did not exist, hence what constitutes the person is a *given*; it is the product of another. This original condition is repeated at all levels of the person’s development [I am already a given-by, given-by-an-other]. The cause of my growth does not coincide with me, but is other than me. [So then, what is experience?] *Concretely, experience means to live what causes me to grow* [it is that which makes my person develop; it’s the increment of the “I” we spoke of yesterday]. A person grows as a result of experience; that is, the valorization of an objective relationship. Note well: ‘Experience’ therefore connotes the fact of *realizing you are growing*.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op. cit., p. 98 [except for the final sentence, which appears only in the Italian version].

To realize you're growing... For this reason, it's not enough for us to continue recounting facts to each other, because we can continue to recount facts and not grow, not realize that we're growing, and you see this from the fact that we're bewildered before the questions that emerge, because there's not true experience. Experience isn't just recounting some things, some facts; experience connotes our realization that we're growing. "Thus we cannot speak of experience without an awareness of 'growing' by it."<sup>18</sup> In other words, it's not experience if there isn't growth, increase, actualization of the dimensions that qualify my "I," my relationship with reality, my knowledge of myself and of things (consciousness and certainty of meaning), my capacity for adherence and for creative manipulation.

## 5. THE TRIPLE FACTOR OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

We are aware and certain of having experience if there's this increase of the person. The alternative to this increase of my "I" is to find myself old and empty. This is what's at stake: either a human journey that leads us to participate ever more actively in the adventure of knowledge with all it implicates, or the void, nothingness, and thus, boredom. It's not a matter of breaking the "enchantment" but of not missing the opportunity of the "enchantment" forever. What we call "enchantment" is the most fleeting aspect that vanishes immediately. For this reason, many times, as we said at the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises, we've seen beautiful things but, an instant later, when the going gets tough, everything vanishes—everything. As the Prophet Hosea said, it's as if we didn't understand. What indicates that we don't understand? The fact that we think it vanishes. Since we haven't grasped, haven't judged, haven't understood what the experience we have is (in fact, in knowledge, the Mystery isn't implicated for us), we think it vanishes. This isn't because we don't behave well or because we're not truly good; no, it happens because of a lack of knowledge.

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<sup>18</sup> L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, op. cit., p. 105.

All we've said so far—that is true of experience in general, beginning with the event as a factor that generates experience - is true to the greatest degree for Christian experience: “The Christian experience and that of the Church are one, single, vital act [“one, single, vital act,” first of all: how impressive is Fr. Giussani’s ability to grasp things in their moment of springing forth, and then making us aware of all that’s implicated in this point of welling up, in this single vital act (think of the encounter)], in which a triple factor is at work, as follows:

a) *An encounter* with an objective fact which has an origin independent of the person having the experience. The existential reality of this fact or event [as early as the case of the Apostles] is a community that can be documented, like every reality which is fully human. This community has an authority expressed through a human voice in judgments and directives, constituting criteria and meaning [thus, he describes this objectivity of what I encounter, something independent of my person]. All forms of Christian experience, even those lived in the innermost recesses of the soul, refer in some way to an encounter with the community and to its authority.”<sup>19</sup> It’s a matter of an absolute precedence of reality. Fr. Giussani spoke of the collision with something exterior, like the disciples’ collision with Something outside of them, the encounter with Jesus: “*a person runs up against a human diversity, a different human reality.*”<sup>20</sup> Let’s not take for granted this collision because, as one of the responsables of the Movement in Italy told me, at times we think, “Ah! The encounter! I already know about that,” and we slip into talking about other things, all true, but skipping this running up against, this collision. This first impact with reality is what we continually skip, and we can all recognize it in ourselves. Well, then, we can’t allow this as a method—don’t even think of it! You might even have made a journey, but then when you explain it, since you haven’t become aware of growing, you tell it already reduced, changing its characteristics. The experience

<sup>19</sup> L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> L. Giussani, “Something that Comes First”, *Traces*, Vol. 10, No. 10 (November), 2008, p. 1.

was true, but we explain it, recount it, reflect it in another way. This means that you haven't become aware of growth.

b) "The ability to properly perceive the meaning of that encounter [and Fr. Giussani says this comes in the single, vital act, not in a later realization]. The value of the fact which we encounter transcends our power to understand, so much so that an act of God is required for an adequate understanding. The same gesture by which God makes His presence known to humanity in the Christian event [pay attention here!] also enhances a person's potential for knowledge, raising him up to the exceptional reality to which God attracts him. We call this the *grace of faith*."<sup>21</sup> The grace of faith is this event I have before me, with which I'm involved in this vital act, in which the Presence exalts my cognitive capacity, to adjust the acumen of the human gaze to that exceptional reality I have before me, to grasp its meaning. It's stunning. It's called "the grace of faith" and it isn't something that somehow drops down on us out of the blue: the grace is this Presence, this contemporaneousness of Christ now, that is in a human reality, in a human diversity; it has the capacity to exalt my cognitive capacity, enlarging reason to suit it to that exceptionality I have before me, so I can grasp the meaning of this exceptionality—because without grasping the meaning of this exceptionality, I don't understand what the encounter is. And since we haven't understood, for this reason, then, we almost wish it would disappear, because we haven't understood what we've encountered.

c) "*An awareness of the correspondence* between the meaning of the Fact we encounter [that is, of the exceptional Presence that I grasp] and the meaning of our own existence, between the reality of Christ and the Church and the reality of our own person, between the Encounter and our own destiny. It is the awareness of this correspondence that brings about the growth of the self, an essential component of [human] experience. Above all,

<sup>21</sup> L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op. cit., pp. 101-102.

in the Christian experience one sees clearly that in an authentic experience, human self-consciousness and capacity for criticism are engaged and that this is very different from a mere impression or a sentimental echo. It is within this verification of Christian experience that the mystery of the divine initiative exalts human reason. [It exalts man's cognitive capacity.] *Freedom* is at work in this verification. We cannot register or recognize the glorious correspondence between the presence of the mystery and our dynamism as human beings unless we have first accepted and are fully aware of our own radical dependence, of the fact that we are 'made.' This awareness constitutes our simplicity, 'purity of heart,' and 'poverty of spirit.' The drama of our freedom is entirely contained in this poverty of spirit, a drama so deep that when it happens, it is nearly hidden."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

*August 22, 2009. Saturday morning*

1. Not even all the confusion and all the bewilderment we carry within can defeat the beauty of what we've listened to and lived these days, so much so that we were all taken up by the magnificence of the beauty. All our chance for hope lies in this re-happening, in something always happening again to defeat this confusion and this bewilderment, because, as we've said, all the confusion and all the bewilderment have an explanation: the lack of judgment, experience reduced to mere feeling, trying, or going through something, reduced to simple reaction to what one feels or goes through. Why does this lack of judgment continually prevail in us, notwithstanding our many experiences of liberation, like what we've lived in these days? I'll tell you why: because we lack a method.

I'll never forget an episode that happened to me at the home of a professor friend in Barcelona, where I met two girls in their senior year of high school. I asked them, "Now that you're finishing your studies, do you have some certainties about mathematics that you can communicate?" They answered immediately, "Yes." "And about life?"...Silence. They remained silent. It's not that they hadn't lived. After all, they'd lived many more hours than all the hours of mathematics they'd done, but what is the difference? In mathematics, they'd learned a method that enabled them to slowly build such a knowledge that, at the end of their itinerary, they could have certainties to communicate. But regarding life, no, nobody had put into their hands the instrument for doing the itinerary, for reaching this certainty. Therefore, already at their tender age, they were beginning to become old and empty, because everything that happened to them didn't make them certain.

Therefore, faced with the question, "Is it possible to defeat the confusion, or do we have to resign ourselves to living bewildered?"

the decision to make is whether we want to travel a road in such a way that everything we live becomes truly experience, or whether we'll settle for any one of the reductions we've spoken about in these days. We see among ourselves, we touch personally the fact that it's useless to repeat a discourse, no matter how correct, that a "group logic" is not enough (as Fr. Giussani said in the last book of the *équipe* published<sup>23</sup>). We need to have a personal experience. But, my friends, the impressive thing is that Fr. Giussani had this conviction from the very start. "From my very first day as a teacher, I've always offered these words of warning to my class: 'I'm not here so that you can take my ideas as your own; I'm here to teach you a true method that you can use to judge the things I will tell you. And what I have to tell you is the result of a long experience, of a past that is two thousand years old.'"<sup>24</sup> He was well aware from the beginning that not even his imposing person, his testimony, was enough: the "I" had to be set in motion so it could judge, from the very first moment. In a young person who is told this, what happens is the exaltation of the subject. Hardly a lessening of the "I" to exalt a certain mechanism or just a belonging to a group; it truly takes the subject seriously, in such a way that he can have in hand a method that enables him to judge what is proposed. Giussani continues, "From the beginning, our educational efforts have always stood by this method, clearly pointing out that it was intended to show how faith could be relevant to life's needs [here's the reason for his insistence on judging]. As a result of the education I received at home, my seminary training, and my reflections later in life, I came to believe deeply that only a faith arising from life experience and confirmed by it (and, therefore, relevant to life's needs) could be sufficiently strong to survive in a world where *everything* pointed in the opposite direction. [...] Showing the relevance of faith to life's needs, and therefore—and this 'therefore' is important—showing that faith is rational, implies a specific concept of rationality. When we say that faith exalts

<sup>23</sup> L. Giussani, *Qui e ora (1984-1985) [Here and Now]*, Bur, Milan, 2009, pp. 269-337.

<sup>24</sup> L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op. cit., p. 11.



rationality, we mean that faith corresponds to some fundamental, original need that all men and women feel in their hearts. In fact, it is significant that instead of the word ‘rationality,’ the Bible uses the word ‘heart.’”<sup>25</sup>

“From my very first day as a teacher.” It’s striking to hear this again after years, after all we’ve seen in these days. Fr. Giussani was aware that if he weren’t able to set into motion the “I,” everything would’ve been useless; he was aware that the witness doesn’t suffice, that the test of the greatness of the witness is the capacity to set the subject—that is, his reason and freedom—into motion. Everything he wanted then, and that he wants now, is precisely this rebirth of the “I” in each of us, because Christ came precisely for this, that our “I” may be born again. It was his continual, almost obsessive yearning: that everything he involved us in should become ours. The key is judgment; judgment is what renders what we do an experience.

We’ve seen that we still struggle to comprehend what experience is and what judgment is. We continually say “judgment” without realizing we do so: for example, we don’t realize that saying, “Not even this is enough for me,” is a judgment, that is, it has implicated a comparison, rapid as it may be, between something that has happened to us and our heart. If I don’t realize it, then it’s useless for life. Saying, “I’ve seen a happy man,” again, is a judgment. Saying, “This finally corresponds to the needs of my ‘I,’” is, again, a judgment. We don’t even realize that being here has required a myriad of judgments! We see and we touch this reduction of experience in action.

2. So then, have we got a chance? Yes, my friends, in starting out from experience. As we said a minute ago, look at the experience we’ve lived in these days. All the confusion hasn’t been able to keep us from acknowledging the beauty of the mountains, or the songs, or the witnesses, or the grandeur of certain gestures. Nothing. It

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

seems so little to say this, but it's a great deal; it's a crack in the confusion. The confusion can be defeated, and in some moments of these days and this year we've had this victory. We haven't just passively listened to certain lessons or seen certain things, a series of initiatives with which we've filled up the time: we've had the experience of this victory over confusion. It's possible to have an experience that has within it the judgment of acknowledgment to which we can adhere, as to something true, because judgment, as we've seen, isn't something intellectual, for people who complicate their lives. It's the acknowledgment of what we have before our eyes, as far as its final implication. It's the human form of relationship with the Presence that happens to us. Judgment is a response; it's the event of the response to the provocation of the Presence. It's the way reason grasps reality in its meaning. Therefore, the lack of judgment is equivalent to the lack of the "I," of my gaze, of my consciousness, and therefore there's no knowledge, just reaction.

You see our difficulty because judgment still seems to us an intellectual act that starts out from zero, like an autonomous and spontaneous production of the intellect, not as the repercussion of being that already implicates the movement of the "I," re-awakened by the irruption of something else. And, as you see, this elementary experience we've had in these days is what Fr. Giussani proposes to us. It's not that Fr. Giussani has some secret well where he gets his ideas; it's simply that he's so loyal to the experience he has, grasps so powerfully all the factors, is so human, is so present to what he does, that he helps us grasp this, so much so that if we weren't with him, we probably wouldn't become aware of what happens in that very rapid event, in that unity. This is Fr. Giussani's continued companionship with us. What Fr. Giussani tells us is the making clear for himself, his becoming aware—and thus our becoming aware—of what happens, of what we all experience, if we start from experience.

For this reason, I've been seeing more and more this summer, in the various gatherings, that there's a confusion between the intention to follow and the real *sequela* of Fr. Giussani. We all

have the good intention to follow (we're here, after all). But it's not enough, because the intention is one thing, while that intense comparison between what we do and what he says, required by *sequela*, is quite another.

This became clear to me in a striking way when a girl recounted how she took the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* seriously and began to make the comparison: it was a sight to behold! She didn't do it generically like us, that is, "I read the chapter and then, deep down, an instant later my initiatives continue to be cued by what pops into my mind," which is what we do here after having read the chapter. She really started to verify intensely how she moved and what the text says. She returned to read the text to see, to judge, to compare how she moved against what Fr. Giussani says. She herself was floored by what was happening, because in very little time she made great progress. I realized that we often think we're following because we have the intention of following, but the intention to follow isn't following; it's a requisite, but it doesn't suffice. Each of us has to take a stand on this, because otherwise all the difficulties we've seen won't be overcome; we'll only postpone them to the future.

Following Fr. Giussani is having human experience—that is, not just feeling, trying, or going through something, but enunciating a judgment. Why does Fr. Giussani insist so much on this with us (who are just like all the others, saturated by the worldly mentality)? He realizes that only "the evidence of experience"<sup>26</sup> can convince you, can help you understand another modality and not perceive it as extraneous to yourself, as if to follow someone you had to simply rip yourself away from your freedom and your reason. No. Only if you see the evidence that comes forth from experience can you discover yourself saying, "This is worth my while humanly; this is what's reasonable to do; this is the correspondence." Otherwise, as always happens, we maintain the intention to follow, but our mentality is that of everyone else: we have the intention of

<sup>26</sup> L. Giussani, *L'avvenimento cristiano. Uomo Chiesa Mondo* [*The Christian Event: Man, Church, World*], Bur, Milan, 2003, p. 56.

following Giussani, but the mentality is that of everyone, and we have a great number of clues (from the [“mercy killing”] case of Eluana, to all those problems that have emerged in these days of comparison and that concern all the continents).

3. Yesterday, one of you told me, “Many of our friends aren’t defined by the encounter made; their ‘belonging’ and mentality of origin define their ‘I’ more than the encounter they have had.” Within this difficulty of ours to understand the need for judgment, something much deeper emerges, which is a conception of faith by which, notwithstanding everything, it’s not an experience, not an experience able to affect us. At times, I have the impression we wish faith could be something like a blood transfusion, where the “I” doesn’t count, something mechanical. But this is against Fr. Giussani’s earliest days of teaching! Just imagine all the days afterwards! That is, not even staying together, not even group logic are enough because, in terms of mentality, we belong elsewhere.

So then, as I said in the Preface to *Here and Now*, quoting Dostoyevsky, in this situation we can understand the importance of the question, “Can a cultured man, a European of our days, believe, really believe in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ?” Perhaps no one has expressed so succinctly and peremptorily the challenge of Christianity in modernity, as Dostoyevsky did in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Fr. Giussani had the courage to face this historical challenge, radicalizing it, if possible. In fact, he wagers everything on the capacity of the educative proposal to generate a type of Christian subject so that “even if everyone—everyone!—were to leave, the person who has this dimension of personal consciousness [that faith generates] can do nothing other than begin things again by himself.”<sup>27</sup>

This personal consciousness, this dimension of personal consciousness can be described as the consciousness of a

<sup>27</sup> J. Carrón, “*Passare da una logica di gruppo a una dimensione di coscienza personale*,” [“Passing from a group logic to a personal consciousness”] in L. Giussani, *Qui e ora (1984-1985)* [*Here and Now*], op. cit., p. 1.

belonging, of the belonging to Christ. It's evident for Giussani that if what he says should happen, that everyone should leave, nobody could base himself on a group logic. Remaining alone, in order to face that challenge, "the passage from the logic of the group to the dimension of personal consciousness as belonging"<sup>28</sup> would be needed. This is because often in certain places we have to begin again by ourselves, or we have to be in the work alone, or we have to face many situations alone. But there, can the person stand on his own or not, or do we have to bring along the group? Is it possible to generate a new creature who has a consciousness born of the encounter made, a Christian subject able to start all over again?

Fr. Giussani, who is so aware of the historical challenge and so aware of our reductions of experience and of our reductions of faith—because this is the problem—challenges all these resistances (of then and of now) to the term "experience," in order to re-propose Christianity in its originality, in its nature, in its elementary aspects. Through the word "experience" the essential elements of Christianity and faith are affirmed and defended against the fideistic—spiritualistic and ethical reductions.

As we've seen, the point of departure of faith is an event, the encounter with an objective fact; it is not a doctrine or an abstract culture or a past, but a real presence, here and now, a phenomenon of different humanity, that is the only one that corresponds to the nature of what happened in the beginning. Think of how Fr. Giussani continually refers us to what will always be the canon of Christianity: the encounter of John and Andrew. Theirs was an experience because they could say, "We've found the Messiah."<sup>29</sup> They made a judgment in the face of that exceptionality. There's an apparent disproportion between what happens and that judgment of exceptionality. Why is it possible to make a judgment so quickly (as we've said these days about the mountains)? Because the more exceptional something is, the easier it is to give this judgment of

<sup>28</sup> L. Giussani, *ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>29</sup> *Jn* 1:41.

exceptionality; the more exceptional it is, the more all the needs of my reason, of my freedom (of beauty, of truth, of justice) come forth, to grasp that exceptionality. Precisely because Christianity is such an exceptional, objective fact before us, that exalts the “I,” it unleashes all the criticality spoken of these days, all the capacity of reason. This exaltation of reason and freedom documents that the exceptionality exists (before what isn’t exceptional I don’t bother; I’m unflappable). That is, it demonstrates that it’s exceptional because it moves me, grabs me and carries me, facilitates judgment for me - that is, it exalts my “I,” because (and this is impressive) the interlocutor of this exceptionality is the heart, not what I think, my culture, my ideas, or all that I lay over it, that is, my confusion. Nothing can impede the dialogue, the challenge that this exceptionality provokes in the heart, sweeping everything clean. If it weren’t so, it would be useless to stay here; we should resign ourselves to being unable to leave this situation.

Looking at what’s happened in us during these days is what can convince us that we have a chance, that is, that the generation of a subject is possible precisely if each of us is loyal to that event that enables us to have this experience. This exceptional Presence turns to the heart, provokes it, challenges it, mobilizes all our humanity, sets it in play, and engages our reason to the point of demanding our judgment. It would be artificial to stop it. Without this judgment, the encounter can’t become our experience. Adherence to the faith can’t be reasonable. “The same gesture by which God makes His presence known to humanity in the Christian event also enhances a person’s potential for knowledge, raising him up to the exceptional reality to which God attracts him. We call this the *grace of faith*.”<sup>30</sup> Expressed in a more theological form: “Faith is the ‘acknowledgement’ that God has become a factor of present experience. Inasmuch as it is ‘acknowledgment,’ it’s an act of reason, a judgment, not a sentiment or a state of mind. Faith

<sup>30</sup> L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op. cit., p. 102.

represents the fulfillment of human reason,<sup>31</sup> made possible by the contemporary presence of Christ who enables us to experience Him through a human reality.

If faith isn't a judgment, it's either spiritualism or sentimentalism. Deep down, it's a faith without adequate motives, that is, it's not human, and one sees that it isn't human because it collapses right away, because it doesn't determine me, because it doesn't affect me, because my original background (my religious or family or cultural or tribal tradition) is more decisive than it is. In the end, there's no possibility of a new subject. This exceptionality doesn't strike you and leave you as you were before. It re-awakens in you all these needs and facilitates your acknowledgment. For this reason, judgment is the key of experience, the key to whether that exceptionality was able to awaken the "I" with all its capacity to reach a judgment. Therefore, you see clearly that the witness doesn't suffice, but also that the "I" can't get there without the witness. They can't be put in opposition, because the test is that the witness re-awakens me (and in this lies all the authenticity of the Catholic conception of faith). The test is whether the presence of Christ can re-awaken the "I" and set into motion all my human capacity for generating a new creature, or whether there is in us simply an affirmation of Christ, by which He, though continually and insistently affirmed, is incapable of changing the "I." Here you see the frequent effect of a certain Protestant mentality. If faith isn't Catholic, if it's not according to the perfection that coincides with the nature of the event just as it happened, then it's useless - that is, we can go home right now and not waste any more time. So then, it's there, when you make this journey, that you realize how that event is humanly worthwhile, how it corresponds to your humanity. However, again, we can stay before impressive facts but not walk, and in the end it's as if it weren't useful, because it doesn't make the "I" grow.

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<sup>31</sup> L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo* [*Generating Traces in the History of the World*], Rizzoli, Milan, 1998, p. 32.

4. The test of faith (this human experience in which all the “I” is engaged and involved) is memory. I want to end with this great passage from *School of Community*: “John and Andrew had faith, because they had certainty in a perceptible Presence. When they were there, in the first chapter of Saint John, seated at His house, toward evening, looking at Him speak, there was a certainty in a perceptible Presence of something exceptional, of the divine in a perceptible Presence. Then—I’m adding—they went home to sleep: Andrew to his wife; John to his mother. They went home, they ate at their home, they slept at their home, they got up, they went fishing together with the others in their group. What they had seen the afternoon before was dominating their minds—yes or no? Yes. Were they seeing Him? No.

“But man experiences, has the experience of a presence, not only when he touches it, face to face; moreover, this way of wanting to experience a presence normally establishes something useless, it establishes a relationship that doesn’t work—as is the case between all boys and girls—even when it works, it doesn’t work. Instead, between the previous day and noon when they returned home with boats full of fish and they sat down there on the beach and were still relating the things that had happened the day before, the segment that relates the previous evening to the day after is called memory. Memory is the continuation of the experience of a present, the continuation of the experience of a person who is present, of a presence that no longer has the qualities and immediacy of when one grabs someone’s nose and pulls, pulls, pulls, or else takes his hair and pulls his hair as children do with their mothers—that immediacy absolutely doesn’t decide the depth and confidence of the relationship. They wouldn’t have seen Him again for another three weeks; the dominant desire for those two was to go to see Him again, because it was clear that it was He, that He was He. They didn’t know who He was, but it was He.

“Memory is the awareness of a Presence. Concerning this Presence, you must distinguish when it began by what came after. When it began you saw His hair, and since there was wind and His



hair got in His eyes, one instinctively pulls His hair to the side. But the day after, there was no more wind and they didn't have that face in front of them; nevertheless He was present. After a week, that Presence was Presence again, and after a month, Presence again; three years had gone by without seeing Him, all of their lives had been torn by the desire to see His hair again blown about in the wind: but that was He, an absolute certainty. The last [...] thought that would have come to mind to those two (they wouldn't have seen Him again for six months) would have been the doubt that it had been an illusion. It never would have come into their minds that it was an illusion: for someone who had seen Him like this... impossible that this should come to mind. [Someone who has had an experience like this... impossible: if it should cross our minds that it's only an illusion, it's because we haven't had this experience]. Instead of Him with His hair in the wind, instead of watching Him speak with His mouth opening and shutting, He arrives through our presence, which is like fragile masks, fragile skin, the fragile masks of something powerful, which is He who lies within - not I or him or you, but something that nevertheless passes through me, passes through you, passes also through Him - and the things of today that no one tells you about. They aren't mine, they are His, He who Andrew and John were watching speak on that afternoon; He spoke and spoke, and in that way, conquering time and space, He spoke to you; and He will speak to you the day after tomorrow and in ten years from now.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> L. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Volume 2: Hope*, McGill-Queens University Press, 2008, pp. 144-146.