

Teatro Capranica – Rome, November 17, 2011

“And God Saw That It Was Good”

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“And God saw that [...] was good [...] very good” (Gn 1:4,10,12,18,21,31). This affirmation, repeated six times in the first chapter of Genesis, expresses the fundamental conviction of the people of Israel about reality—it is good, that is, very good. It is not a naïve affirmation, made by some inexperienced person from outside the real history of men and their afflictions. As we know, these first chapters of Genesis were not written at the beginning of the history of Israel, but many centuries later, at the end of a long road, in which Israel was not spared any of the suffering undergone by other peoples.

And it is because of this that the question becomes even more urgent—how can Israel have such a certain conviction about the positivity of reality after its entire history was rife with suffering, tribulations, and torments of every kind?

This attitude of the ancient people of Israel toward reality is even more surprising if we put it in the cultural context of the neighboring peoples. In fact, the experience of pain had brought the others to a very different conviction—that is, that reality is not entirely positive; on the contrary, that there are two types of reality, one positive and one negative. It is what is expressed by Manichaeism—there are two principles, one good and one bad, that are reflected in a good creation and a bad one. Why didn’t this Manichaean vision gain the upper hand in Israel, as well?

Because of its history. The experience that the Israelites had of God, even in the midst of their trials, was so positive that they couldn’t but affirm His goodness. God revealed Himself with all of His salvific power. And from this experience, they concluded that He, the Savior, is also the Creator. There is only one good principle at the origin of everything. Everything that comes from God, who is good, is equally good. Therefore, reality is positive. It was the presence of God among His people that educated the Jews to look at reality in its truth, to the point of not letting themselves be determined by the various tribulations that could have impeded them from having an authentic gaze toward reality.

An example comes to mind that I used to give to my high school students. If two parents bring their child to Disneyland, we can easily imagine that the child will be amazed by all of the attractions with which he can have fun. If we are attentive to his reactions, one after another, we will also be struck by the fascination that reality is able to provoke in him.

Everything is perceived as positive. But if, by chance, the child is separated from his parents and gets lost in the middle of the crowd, everything changes. The reality is the same as before, but the perception of it has changed. Radically. He doesn't feel it to be friendly, but threatening, hostile. And only by finding his parents can the true perception of reality be restored.

But what is most striking is that the people of Israel really understood this positivity of reality, even in the moment of crisis. With the loss of the temple, the monarchy, and their land, going into exile, Israel had been stripped of everything that it identified as the foundation of its faith. "Why, O Jacob, do you say, and declare, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?'" It seems to them that they have been abandoned, "disregarded," by the God who had chosen them. To respond to this question, Israel was constrained to find a foundation that was even more solid. God sends Isaiah to aid His people, to help them to look carefully at the reality before them: "Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these [that is, the waters of the sea, the immensity of the heavens, the dust of the earth, and the mountains] [...] Do you not know or have you not heard? The Lord is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth" (Isa 40:12s, 26-28). When everything collapses, there is something that remains—reality and eyes educated to look at it.

With the flyer, "The Recession, a Challenge that Calls for Change," signed by Communion and Liberation, we want to help each other to look at reality starting from our experience. It is about a judgment regarding the situation in which we are immersed, that risks the collapse of Italy and all of Europe. In front of this fact, everyone is called to take a position.

In keeping with the perspective described in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* by Father Giussani, the keystone of our position is synthesized at the beginning of the flyer by the phrase, "reality is positive." We have all felt, in ourselves and in others, the impact of this judgment as soon as we started to spread it. Why? Why do we feel this impact? Is it true that reality is positive? This is the challenge that we want to launch to everyone, first of all to ourselves, because we too think that there is a good reality and another reality that is less good—we are Manichaeans—and we are immersed in a situation that clouds us, so that we can't look at reality clearly. Why do we feel the impact?

Because of the claim that this judgment contains, for this claim strikes our mentality.

With this judgment, we are not offering an interpretation of the crisis that is valid only for Catholics, as if to say that for "us" reality is positive, because the companionship, our

being together, “convinces” us to think like this, to console ourselves like this. Our claim is that we are dealing with an evidence that everyone can recognize. Even at this level, Giussani comes to help us: “A positivity in front of life, of reality, is not induced by companionship—it would be a poor consolation—but it is dictated by our nature; the companionship makes it easier for us to accept this, even when going through bad conditions, complex situations” (L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is it (really?!) Possible to Live this Way?]*, BUR, Milan 2011, pp. 292–293).

Reality can be *perceived* as positive because it *is* positive. We are not talking about “baptizing” reality starting from a religious preconception, a “pious” vision, but about recognizing it in its ultimate nature. Reality is ontologically positive.

Why?

Reality is positive because it’s there. *Everything that exists* is there because the Mystery permitted it to happen (everything, in fact, has an origin in a mysterious Something; nothing makes itself); it provokes and sets the person in motion, it represents an invitation to change, an occasion to take a step toward one’s own destiny. Every circumstance is the path and the instrument of our journey—it is a *sign*. Insomuch as it is there, reality is a provocation, and therefore the occasion for the reawakening of the I from its torpor. Even the crisis, because it raises pressing questions.

“A crisis,” says Hannah Arendt, “forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments. A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with preformed judgments, that is, with prejudices. Such an attitude not only sharpens the crisis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides” (H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, The Viking Press, New York 1968, pp. 174–175).

But the irreducible positivity that we are talking about does not reveal itself mechanically, but rather only to those who accept the challenge of reality, who take its questions seriously, who do not retreat in front of life’s urgency. Only those who accept this kind of challenge will be able to find adequate reasons to give to themselves and others for dealing with the crisis. How many witnesses there are of people for whom difficulties became occasions for change! This is the greatness of the I that we have to wield in front of the crisis; otherwise, we are already defeated, even if the financial situation is resolved, defeated in our person because we have accepted to be a cog in the wheel of circumstances. For so many people, situations of suffering have made possible their liberation from a dull life; so many unexpected and surprising fruits have been born from pain that was accepted or defeats

through which they let themselves be called into question! How many witnesses of people that, because of the change and the intensity that they experienced, are grateful for what happened to them, though they would never have wished for it to happen! What happened was the mysterious means for a reawakening of the I and a deeper comprehension of the nature of reality, which they thought they already knew.

Reality is positive because of the Mystery that dwells in it. But what is needed to grasp this positivity? What is required for a recognition of reality like this? Reason, or better, a use of reason according to the true nature of knowledge of reality in all of its factors. Reason, in fact, can grasp reality as a “given” that vibrates with activity and attraction, as a provocation, and thus as an invitation. “To be reasonable means to recognize that which emerges in experience,” says Father Giussani. “And in experience, reality emerges as positivity [this is the challenge that Father Giussani launches at our way of judging—in experience, reality emerges as positivity]. Reality emerging in experience is so positive that it appears inexorably as attraction” (L. Giussani, *Realtà e giovinezza. La sfida* [*Reality and Youth: The Challenge*], SEI, Turin 1995, p. 98).

And yet, if we look around, we see that, unfortunately, this use of reason is very rare; on the contrary, it seems almost impossible to find. If reason does not grasp this mystery that constitutes the heart of reality, its most precious value, man yields to the temptation to understand the affirmation, “Reality is positive,” in a sentimental or moralistic way, as if it meant that reality is desirable and pleasant. How does this happen?

Because of our fragility (a profound weakness that is in us) and the conditioning of the cultural and social context, the power that surrounds us, this use of reason is often extraneous to us. Because of this fragility and this conditioning, when we come upon a reality that shows a negative and contradictory face, reason—which is originally open to reality—backs off, trembles, becomes confused. All it takes is the appearance of an inconvenience on the horizon of daily life to cast doubt on its positivity. We see it in our lives—as soon as something doesn’t go according to our desires, it becomes a crisis. Just imagine what happens, then, in front of an economic crisis of these dimensions. And reality, which is a sign that opens, becomes a tomb in which we all, many times, suffocate.

The Mystery, entering into history, came into this dramatic situation in order to bring its decisive contribution, as the history of the people of Israel demonstrates. The flyer about the crisis speaks of the Judeo-Christian tradition as a source of this human position—because of its very nature, in fact, faith is an event that is capable of reawakening the religious sense, reason, and of sustaining and fulfilling the capacity of man to stay in reality and treat

everything according to its true nature; it allows us to perceive reality in its positivity. Christ came at the culmination of the history of the people of Israel for this—to reawaken our I so that we can face any challenge. Christ did not promise to spare us anything, but to make us capable of facing anything—which is different—and to accompany us to victory. Christ comes even today, since we, like the Jewish people in their moment of crisis, are also in a situation of fragility that is insurmountable for our strength. Christ did not become incarnate to spare us the work of our reason, our freedom, our engagement, but to make it possible—because this is what makes us become men, what makes us live life like a fascinating adventure, even in the midst of all its difficulties, even and above all in times of crisis, when everything becomes a question of life and death—without losing our heads and our souls. Christ became our companion in order to reawaken all of the potential of reason to recognize reality. He came to reawaken the religious sense, so that we are “more” men—putting us in optimal conditions to look at reality according to its true nature—and not to make us “visionaries.”

“The dominant culture of today,” said Father Giussani, “has abandoned reason as knowledge, as recognition of the evidence with which reality proposes itself in experience, that is, as positivity. And it has given up on affection for reality, love for reality. It has given up on love, because in order to recognize reality as it emerges in experience, it is necessary to accept the shock that one feels. Man does not accept reality as it appears, and he wants to invent it in the way that he wants [these are words that acquire additional weight now, in front of the financial situation; they are not empty words], he wants to define it in the way that he wants, he wants to give it the face that he wants” (L. Giussani, *Realtà e giovinezza. La sfida [Reality and Youth: The Challenge]*, op. cit., p. 100).

In this situation we can understand the momentous relevance of the battle, carried forward despite general indifference, by Benedict XVI, for the defense of the true nature of reason, to “broaden reason,” for a “reason open to the language of being,” that is, for an I that is equipped to deal with any challenge.

Father Giussani describes the path for a “reawakening” in this way: “To perceive *existence as need* to construct and, therefore, need for a destiny, for a goal—to construct means to collaborate in realizing a goal, to collaborate in developing and carrying out a plan; *rationality*, loved reason, true guide of man, light of experience; *affection* as the heart of man, fire and heat of experience; and *freedom*, which, in its possibility to choose does not become a blade, a knife that cuts through the balance, originally mysterious and effectively constructive and fascinating, of knowledge and affection, but is the embrace of experience in the totality of its factors, without losing anything that is there, that emerges before our eyes and touches our

heart. The ‘reawakening’ comes from having our feet firmly on the ground of *nature*, as it appears in experience, as it places itself in experience, as it imposes itself in the plumbed depths of experience in its original factors” (*ivi*).

It is at this level that Christ demonstrates his exceptionality—giving man back to himself. Therefore, a religious sense that is alive is the verification of faith; in the same way, a true, full use of reason is a verification of faith, it is the powerful and unmistakable documentation that the relationship with Christ, who is contemporaneous with each one of us, is recognized and lived. Christianity does not add itself on from the outside, like a superstructure, like a pietism, to the life of man, but it clarifies, educates, and saves the very nature of man, which was wounded but not destroyed by original sin.

“And the first consequence [...] is an inexorable hope as the ultimate sense of the relationship with things, as the ultimate sense of the journey among things—it is a positivity that defeats every adversity that we experience. Saint Paul says, in fact, the most revolutionary phrase in all of universal literature: *omnis creatura bona*, every creature is good. [...] Because of this, Saint Paul concludes, *omnia cooperantur in bonum*—all things cooperate for the positivity of your life, for good” (L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is it (really?!) Possible to Live this Way?]*, op. cit., pp. 293–294).

Shortly before he was martyred, Saint Thomas More consoled his daughter with these words: “Nothing can come but that that God will. And I make me very sure that whatsoever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be the best” (From a letter of St. Thomas More, written in prison, to his daughter Margaret Roper); see *The Last Letters of Thomas More*, edited by Alvaro De Silva, Eerdmans Publishing 2000, pp. 72–89).

We still see it—reality as sign. It is not we who determine that it is like this. It *is* like this. The crisis invites everyone—us and the others—to verify its truth. How?

The crisis is the circumstance that the Mystery did not spare us—in the same way that it did not spare the Jewish people their trials—so that we do this verification now; circumstances, in fact, are an essential, and not secondary, part of our vocation as men. If, in front of the current context, we do not live reality in its true nature, it means that faith is not lived in its authenticity, it’s not Christian faith, and therefore we don’t live it as the recognition of a Presence that exalts our original humanity. Then faith is useless, because it is not able to make us live now, in this situation. But a faith like this becomes part of the problem and not of the solution. Instead, paradoxically, the crisis can represent the possibility to verify the human expediency of faith, its reasonableness.

Insomuch as we accept this challenge and personally carry out the verification, we will be able to give reasons for the experience that we live, to offer a way, a suggestion, to stand before the others with a cultural identity, to offer something more than everyone's complaints—there are already enough of those—because, as we have repeated many times, “the contribution of Christians can be effective only if knowledge of faith becomes knowledge of reality” (Benedict XVI, Address to the 24th Plenary Session of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, May 21, 2010). So, if we accept this work, we will be able to fill ourselves with such a richness of experience that we will be able to share it in dialogue with everyone, and we will discover what constitutes the historical influence of Christians.

“The Recession, a Challenge that Calls for Change” marks the beginning and the urgency for us of a public cultural battle, by CL itself, first of all with ourselves, that concerns the experience of faith as it was communicated to us, and that is a battle for the human. It is the attempt to communicate to co-workers, friends, and anyone who we encounter, the hope that is in us. But it would be an illusory hope, without foundation, if it were not sustained by a verification of experience, by a true use of reason. As the Pope witnesses to us, Christians will not be more believable by becoming more “pious,” but by using their reason adequately, by offering a real contribution; he witnesses to it himself in his trip to Germany, challenging everyone with a different use of reason.

Only in this way will we be able to give a truly decisive contribution. Otherwise we will be insignificant—even if we get all fired up like everyone else—for our fellow men, and we will fail at a historical duty—to reawaken hope, though we are in the crisis like everyone else. And we Christians can do this—even though we are fragile like everyone else—because of the gift that we have received and that we can't keep for ourselves.

Our flyer about the crisis is dictated by a judgment—the impetus of each one is a good for all; the energy of the I is not used up in itself, but constructs a people. The history of Italy is a striking example, as we saw in the exhibit on *150 Years of Subsidiarity*; in front of situations that were much worse than ours—think of the post-war era, with Italy destroyed—people who were moved by a positive impetus got together, took the initiative, and rebuilt the country.

Father Giussani is truly our friend, because he indicates to us what it is that constitutes the originality of this cultural battle. These are words pronounced prophetically in 1986, during the glorious 1980s, when the world seemed to navigate toward a bright future and the crisis had not yet come. “The solution,” he said then, “is a battle to save—not the battle to stop the shrewdness of civilization, but the battle to rediscover, to testify, man's dependence on

God. What has been, throughout time, the true meaning of the human struggle, that is to say, the struggle between the affirmation of the human and the instrumentalization of the human by those in power, has now reached an extreme. [...] The greatest danger today is not the destruction of peoples, killing, murder, but the attempt by the reigning power to destroy the *human* [our true resource]. And the essence of the human is freedom, i.e., the relationship with the infinite. Therefore, it is mainly in the West that the great battle must be fought by the man who feels himself to be a man [together with all men who feel thus]: the battle between authentic religiosity and power. The limit of power is true religiosity—the limit of any power: civil, political, and ecclesiastic [as it may be]” (L. Giussani, “Christ, All We Have,” *Traces-Litterae communionis*, n. 2, 2002, p. V).