

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, February 29, 2012**

Reference text: At the Origin of the Christian Claim, chapters I and II, McGill Queen's, Montreal, pages 3-28.

Song: Non son sincera

Song: Romaria

Glory be

It is striking that from the very beginning of the book Fr. Giussani has a crucial concern that we cannot skip if we want to follow him and understand him. Therefore, I think that this short initial paragraph is crucial: it would be impossible for us to fully grasp what Jesus Christ means unless each of us first has this impassioned and tender awareness of himself. Then, how did Fr. Giussani's insistence help us in the work on these two chapters that focus on what I am?

As time passes I get a little concerned about being able to change, being able to grow, and that the time that passes may be useful to my life and not see me go backwards; in short, that my performance may always improve. I was struck – and for me it was a gift, a grace – by what you said on January 25th, “Christ has made each of us His own. The more Christ has made me His own, the more I am intent in the race to make Him my own again. [This is what strikes me:] In the long run, what we are pursuing is no longer even a change, that is, our own measure of the hundredfold, but His presence, a relationship with Him. This is the case in every loving relationship that is fully human – nothing can satisfy, but the presence of the loved one. This sets in the world an irreducible figure of man, not satisfied with any ‘intermediate’ objective.” This gave me an ultimate sense of peace, because I am this man, and I do desire to be irreducible and to keep being in love like this, because I think that objectively I cannot live without Jesus.

Many times the words we use already hint at the fundamental problem: without even noticing it, as he said at the beginning, we reduce the nature of Christianity to a certain kind of change, to a performance. Why does this happen? This is the most crucial issue we have to face, because we all know many things about Christianity, but most of the time when we speak of it we reduce it; we reduce it to ethics, to an image of change, to doctrine, to something we already know; we reduce it to a performance (having to behave according to a certain model), to a feeling or to success in the sense of accomplishment. This is why I am struck by the fact that in the Introduction Fr. Giussani says right after, “To consider Christianity in a way that is not somehow reductive [this is the problem!] depends on the breadth and depth of one's perception [...] of the religious sense.” If we reduce the religious sense, that is the nature of our ‘I’, we inevitably reduce Christianity as well. I am giving an example I have used in the past: it is clear that it happened also to the disciples; they desired change and accomplishments as well, and when they got them they were all excited thinking, “See? Christianity is this.” How does Jesus correct the disciples? Where does the inner shift come from? It originates from the way Jesus looks at them, the gaze that captures their religious sense, the drama of their ‘I’, without reducing it: “My friends, if you rejoice for this it is not what will help you getting up tomorrow morning.” Pay attention: it is not that the disciples did not have Him in front of them, it is not just a problem of having Him in front of us; they did have Him in front of them, present in the flesh – and many times we complain of not having Him! - , but this was not enough to notice the difference, to grasp His true nature.

So much so that they were happier for their accomplishments than for having Him in front of them; and Jesus has to make them move, introducing them to their own mystery. He has to make them aware, to introduce them to that tender and impassionate awareness of themselves without which they would be unable to understand that true joy, the true answer is in the relationship with Him, in the fact that they were chosen. Do you see how useless is the objection we often make of not being as ‘lucky’ as the disciples? This is not the issue, because they have everything we complain of not having, and yet it is not enough to grasp automatically who Christ is, and thus find the source of true joy that is the relationship with Him. They were lacking this awareness of themselves that Jesus captures in them, that gaze with which Jesus looks at them. Pay attention: Jesus is not ‘creating’ who they are; no, Jesus simply does not accept to reduce them to what they reduce themselves to, that is, He looks at them according to their truth. If this does not become our experience – says Fr. Giussani - we will inevitably reduce Christianity. We can speak of Christianity as an event, we can speak of everything using the right words, but as soon as we open our mouth everything is reduced. Because it is not enough to say the words to change how we think of ourselves; we need an experience, a decisive gaze on ourselves. This is why these first two chapters are crucial. I wonder who among us, during the work of the past weeks, read something that changed the way he thinks of himself. Because this is what School of Community is. Who among all the people present here can tell us something in which he concretely had a different perception of himself. Otherwise we will reduce Christ.

About this inner shift I wanted to tell you how I verified this in a fact that happened to me between yesterday and today. Since January 25th, but also working on these two chapters, what you said kept churning inside me: the fact that the verification of the transition from religious sense to faith is an ‘I’ that faces reality with a different humanity. A dearest friend had made me notice many things about myself, about my way of working and facing reality that made me understand clearly that my way of working was completely analytical, like everybody else, and did not offer anything new to the world. This is the first verification. A fact happened. I am a cardiologist. Recently I started to work and maybe due to my inexperience or to the fear of making a mistake or to many other things, [these feelings influenced me] as I started my shift I was called for a consultation with a woman whom a colleague of mine had already mentioned to me. In my opinion it was unnecessary to call me; this woman had already been evaluated by the referral center the day before, so what could I add to it? Already when I was called I was very vocal with the colleague who had involved me. Then, with this pre-conceived and totally reduced position, as if reality was just provoking my fear, I went upstairs. I did the consultation, I closed the chart and I went home. But things were not adding up, not at all! I had this terrible emptiness inside. You keep saying, “The verification is a different ‘I’.” Instead I found myself having worked as everybody else: my ‘I’ was reduced, all my desire to build something at work was reduced and my relationship with that patient was reduced (in fact, I even barely looked at her). Things were not adding up.

Why were things not adding up? Because you had not performed well?

No, from a clinical point of view I had no doubts, but it was not the truth of me that you are talking about, and it was not the truth of that reality. And it struck me, because inside that reality I started to realize that, on the contrary, I have been looked at in a different way, and those words that kept resounding in my head were showing me again the road to take. So, today I went back to that ward, I found again the person I had spoken to on the phone and I told her, “First of all I want to apologize for the way I behaved yesterday.” A very interesting discussion started from there, a new world opened up for me, so much so that in the end I told her, ‘Listen, I did not come back because I had doubts from a clinical point of view, but

truly for myself, for this doubt about truth.” In the end I picked up the patient’s chart and I went to discuss it again with the consulting physician of that ward, who is more knowledgeable than I am. Reexamining the whole case he brought to my attention some clinical details I had not looked at in depth. So, I went back to that ward for the third time – pride is an unmistakable aspect of my personality and I would have never gone back for an idea or a thought – , I looked for that colleague and I told her, “I am sorry, yesterday I almost insulted you, and now I am here to...” In the end she told me, “Do not worry, this is how we learn, things are not set in stone. Thanks for coming back.” I thought: with this different approach that allowed me to gain a complete view of reality, Christ even teaches me how to work! With my analysis I had not been able to find a solution, it was a very reduced relationship that was emptying me. Today, when I went home I told myself: this is another way of living, another possibility. This has been my own verification and nothing can take it away from me.

Thank you. Life can truly be something else!

I am going to tell you what I see that really makes me move and change in life, but then I would like to pose a question. What really allows me to face my whole self, the whole question I am made of and reality, is a relationship that embraces my entire life, a very concrete relationship with certain people who show me that I can face my questions without being afraid of what I am living. The question I still have, and that I have also seen coming up frequently among us, is how can this position become permanent, because even when I am in relationship with these people, it is as if I get blocked, as if I tell myself: fine, now I am ok, I found the answer. So, I do not understand what it means when we continue to hear that the answer makes the question grow. How does the relationship with Christ continue to open wide my humanity, keeping the question open? Because what I experience is this: this dynamics is clear for ‘normal’ things (the example you give of falling in love is very clear, because in front of the person I love I do not hope for my question nor for the answer to end), but in front of the ultimate questions it is as if I see myself differently.

What is the difference?

You find yourself still stuck. How is it possible? I have met the answer, how is it possible that instead this need is still surfacing? I have met what corresponds, what makes the relationship full; how is it possible that instead I find myself so needy? When does it happen that I do not suffocate? When I am in front of someone who reopens wide my whole ‘I’. However, then it is as if I reduce it right away, thinking: fine, now I am ok.

And so? In the same way you understand what happens in the dynamics of falling in love, you have to look at what happens when you recognize Christ present, verifying if the same dynamics happens also in this case. Otherwise we start to imagine things. The dynamics is not different; it is simply a hundred times more, because the more exceptional the personality that is drawing you is ... Imagine how the question ‘Who is this man?’ exploded in front of Jesus’ exceptionality. And was this decreasing in time or the more they saw what He was doing the more their amazement grew? Do I make myself clear? But we can understand this not as an explanation (that you already know, by the way), but only as amazement in front of what happens. You don't understand this by making your mind work hard, but by looking at what happens when it happens to you. Then you will find the answer. Because then you will see that the dynamics is not different, as we can see with the disciples. But you have to document it in your own experience, in the flesh of your experience.

The amazing thing is that the fact for me happened now, because I had made myself a list and you turned it upside down in a positive way. I really recognized myself in what you said about the apostles and the journey they made, which is not different from ours, because God

has made me move twice, really nicely, putting me once again in front of the question you were asking: where is true satisfaction? More or less a year ago I found a job that corresponded to me a lot, satisfying precisely that little piece that I thought was missing for me to succeed, the well-known success.

This is the first issue: we constantly mistake ‘correspondence’ with ‘succeeding’ and this already shows the reduction we apply to the ‘I’.

This is true, also because in the end it was a matter of my skills: can I make it or not? So, a very beautiful experience, I have to say extraordinary, I cannot say otherwise, we even put together a very beautiful event and it went really well. However, at a certain point, at the height of my satisfaction there was that instant in which I said: is that all? And right there, at the height of my satisfaction – I really had to go through all of it – I said: no, what interests me is the relationship with Jesus. The phrase “You are what is missing in everything I like” came to my mind, because in truth I understood these words intellectually, but I had not yet lived all of them in my experience. This was up to mid-November. At the beginning of December there was a Copernican revolution: the financial resources suddenly ended and, in short, everything came to a halt. The relationship remained, which is even more painful because in any case a great friendship had developed and still exists and then, suddenly I was sent home. There the second shift happened, because in the face of a terrible financial strain (I have to say that I never had such a difficult time) I told myself: the form has changed, but not the question. He is asking me again what it is that I consist of. On Friday I am going to meet with that person again, I don’t know if we will resume the relationship, but what nobody can take away from me is this experience.

But what did you learn from this? Explain to me clearly where you perceived what we are trying to answer: what Christ is. Because, many times not only we make a mistake identifying two things that are different – succeeding and correspondence - , but we also mistake Christ with anything we imagine. Where does this take us in the end? To not having grasped what Christ really is.

But, really, if our humanity is missing, that clear perception of ourselves that in the end is what wins...

This is why I am interested. I am not interested in whether or not we make mistakes, because if you learned all this by making a mistake, the mistake is the best thing that happened in your life! Otherwise, why should we follow Christ, why is Christ interesting for us, what is the difference between Christ and any other thing?

Precisely for the truth of myself, for what I consist of.

Exactly. However, I can understand how Christ is different, and thus, who Christ is, and fully realize what Jesus Christ means, Fr. Giussani says, only if I don’t reduce the “I”, if I don’t reduce my “I”. And so, look what he says right after the passage that I read earlier: “If, therefore, my aim is to discover how Christianity emerged, we need to review certain decisive features of the religious sense in general.” He is not going back to the religious sense now as an ornament, but for the purpose of understanding what Christianity is, because – he says – without this step we can’t understand it and we reduce it. This “coincides with the rational dimension, [with all the needs of our reason] with reason in its ultimate, most profound form, [it coincides with that] global, all-embracing impulse that is the religious sense, [it coincides] with an urgent need for total fulfillment, for maximum completeness.” If we don’t have this loyalty, this gaze full of tenderness towards ourselves, then we’ll reduce Christianity. Excuse me now, but is Fr. Giussani making these things up or is he describing who we are? If this is the description of what we are made of, each one of us needs to try and experience this in one’s own inner being, “hidden [...] in every form of dynamism, in every act of human living, which thus proves to be a plan drawn up by that global impetus, [which we call] the religious sense.” Look, everything that Fr. Giussani is saying is so crucial, that in

modern time Christianity itself has been reduced, precisely because the first thing that was reduced was the “I”! This is why Fr. Giussani here is saying something crucial for us, because without this, inevitably, we reduce Christianity, even if we use all of the Christian terms. This is why I beg you not to skip these steps, not to turn the page saying: “I know this already, I worked on the religious sense last year.” We don’t know it, we don’t know it! In fact, it is the thing we know the least, I dare say, because we can see this from the way we talk about things. As a matter of fact, what should be more and more present, familiar? What should we be more and more aware of? The sense of the mystery that we are. But this, as we can see so many times, is the last thought we have. And so we get angry at ourselves, we get angry at reality, and we look for things that, once found, are not useful to us after all. Fr. Giussani says: “This perpetual situation of disproportion and unattainability [the fact that I can’t reach it] facilitates the birth in man’s consciousness of the idea of mystery.” If this doesn’t constantly grow in our self-awareness as men, we inevitably relate to the Christian event in a reductive way, and we mistake it for any other thing (as His disciples did, who mistook it for any other thing). Why? Because, after all we have not become fully aware of what Jesus Christ means. This is not a problem of performance. It’s not a problem of being better at something or of making fewer mistakes. The problem is perceiving reality correctly, grasping in a truly and fully conscious way what Christ means. If we skip this by thinking that it’s already clear, we’ll read the rest of the book and we’ll continue to reduce it with the inevitable consequence that we will miss the best. I guarantee you: we’ll miss out the best! Only when we become aware of ourselves, we then realize what grace Jesus Christ represents.

On page 11 of the presentation you quote Fr. Giussani: “Christianity happens in communion, but is played out in the freedom of each person.” I want to ask you a clarification in terms of the method to use in regard to this. About companionship, then, you say: “our support cannot have any other logic [...] than that of witness. [...] Only I can answer before the Lord to the Christian claim.” Recently I lived a few circumstances in certain contexts related to the movement that turned out to be a great opportunity for me to verify my faith. In these contexts I had to compare my ongoing experience of regeneration, almost of revolution, of my “I”. This was, above all, thanks to the work you are asking us to do, and to a certain kind of attitude which, I would dare to define as rejection of one’s own heart and, so, rejection of Christ. These experiences have increased my restlessness. In fact, in a certain sense, they have helped me re-discover it as a resource – I love when Saint Paul says: “Reality, instead, is Christ. All works out for good of those who love God. Dying is gain”–, but I have always felt reality as something outside of me. This experience has given me a great opportunity to discover how Christ finds me through my restlessness, and how my restlessness is a resource, which is kind of what you were saying earlier, also because it was a tool to avoid getting stuck in certain dynamics. So, these experiences have made me more restless, and have renewed in me the attitude of the beggar which helps me recognize more as companions on our journey – this is a passage – the publicans of evangelical memory. I mention this as an attitude because recently I heard at Mass this passage of the Gospel, and I thought it really corresponded to me. “But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed: ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Within this dynamics I am describing I was very touched by the Holy Father’s homily on the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, and I am going to read a short segment: “A restless heart [...] is the heart that, after all, is not satisfied with anything that is less than God and, precisely in this way, it becomes a loving heart. Our heart is restless towards God and will always be so, even

though today, with very effective 'narcotics,' they try to free man from this restlessness." Going back to what I was saying earlier, in the experience I was referring to I saw how sometimes the companionship risks to be reduced to one of the many 'narcotics' the Pope was mentioning, rather than being a place of living witness. It's like turning the method upside down: instead of fostering a full awareness of oneself and of being made for the Mystery, for the infinite – "what is this lack a lack of?" –, rather, it tends to flatten one's desire and one's question, and to favor the famous attitude of being on a treadmill. Also, one's fidelity to what Newman calls 'consciousness' and which Fr. Giussani defines 'heart', better yet, which Benedict XVI calls 'restless heart', is interpreted as individualism, autonomy or, even worse, as lack of tension to obedience. So, it's as if, in certain contexts – this is my impression – the "I" should no longer exist. So my question is: how do you get out of this? Sometimes (I don't mean to generalize) it almost seems to me a person has to choose between companionship and one's own heart.

This alternative doesn't exist. But what you are recalling us to is fundamental, because each one of us is called by name, John, Mary, Zaccheus, Matthew – otherwise we would have to erase the Gospel! Each one of us is called by name. Each one of us is called to answer personally. This is why, as we were saying earlier, there's nothing more personal than this answer. Maybe sometimes we can reduce our way of being together, but this will never be the movement's total companionship. We can reduce some ways in which we live our companionship, but not the companionship in itself. Companionship, as long as the Lord gives us the grace to live it according to the charism that has been given to us, will always help us live reality. Then, in certain ways, we can use it – to use the Pope's words – as a 'narcotic.' Let me explain: because of what has happened to us, we tend to have a better experience of life than most people we know. This, however, can be, as for the disciples, something that, rather than creating a more and more intense tension, makes us settle more and more; rather than introducing a tension, it introduces a calm that flattens. I want to be clear: this will never be the Christian companionship, but a deformation, always lying in ambush, of the Christian companionship. This is why we cannot succumb to this alternative, companionship - I, because we walk this path together. Even just by reading Fr. Giussani we can find everything we need to feel this tension, a reminder of the truth within our companionship (even if we were all reduced). But one instant is enough, for the way we are together or for what we tell each other when we are together, to start up the tension of our "I" all over again. And when any of our settings want to reduce this dynamics, it's necessary to challenge it, because without a place like the Church, a place like the movement where we are constantly re-awakened, we will succumb to a total flattening. This is why a companionship is crucial for the "I", but a companionship is made of living "I's", and this is what we need to tend towards and what we need to ask. This is how we can really become companions: when we witness to each other what it means to live. It is fundamental that we witness to each other in the way we are in reality and live in reality all that we have talked about this evening. And so, I want to re-propose this challenge to each one of us. These chapters are crucial because if we don't have them in mind, we will inevitably reduce Christ, and we won't really be able to fully realize what Jesus Christ means. Someone wrote to me how this can only happen with Christ present; and this is true, because we are already living it from within the faith. However, saying "Christ present" cannot be an alibi, because also from within the faith this gaze, this attentive, tender and impassioned awareness of myself is something to which I need to educate myself constantly. As a matter of fact, when last year we repeated many times that Christ came to educate us to the religious sense, we precisely intended to say that He came to educate us to this perception of the "I". This is why growing in one's perception of the Mystery is decisive in order to be able to grasp who Jesus Christ really is.

For next time we will read chapters three and four of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*. I would like to point out two things in regard to our work. One is that in this chapter we can find Dostoevsky's question: "Can a cultured man, a European of our day, believe, really believe, in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ?" This is the question that we need to keep present in our work on these chapters: what can make answering this question reasonable. And a crucial passage on this is the one that we will read in the third chapter about turning the method upside down. So, I leave you with this question: in my life, where do I discover this turning upside down of the method? Whether I am still on the religious sense or I am already on faith, where do I discover it? Because we can all repeat this first paragraph that is so crucial, however, many times in practical life, although we use Christian words, we are still using the method of the religious sense. Where in my experience do I discover that there has been a total change of method, so that this is not just reduced to an intellectual explanation, not knowing what we are talking about in experience itself? If we can't understand this, it means that it's going to be difficult – better, impossible – to become really aware of what Jesus Christ means, even though we think we know Him just because we use certain Christian words. So I suggest that we use this method to help us in our work.

Our next School of Community will take place on Wednesday, March 28th at 9:30 pm. We will work on the third and fourth chapters of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*. In regard to the School of Community, please read on the new CL website (in the specific section dedicated to the School of Community) the synthesis of a few meetings of responsables with Fr. Giussani, in which he describes what the School of Community is and he explains the method for it. It can help us keep the method more consciously present.

The Easter poster is coming out soon.

We are in a historic moment in which the Pope has announced the Year of faith and we are doing our School of Community about our faith in Christ, as Fr. Giussani told us, with the eyes of the apostles, walking on their same path – from the impact with His humanity to the question about His divinity. We think that re-proposing the text of the permanent Poster of the movement (that came out in 1988), together with the Masaccio's image of Christ – which expresses the attraction, the power of His divinity now –, is the most suitable judgment, for us and for everyone, about the current situation in which we are living.

Let's use it, then, in our environments. It's an opportunity to tell everyone this judgment about our history and everyone's history. I am going to read it to make everyone aware: "The emperor addressed the Christians saying: 'Strange men... tell me, oh Christians forsaken by most of your brothers and leaders: what do you hold most dear in Christianity?' So the starets John stood up and answered gently: 'Great sovereign! What we hold most dear in Christianity is Christ Himself. He Himself and everything that comes from Him, since we know that in Him all the fullness of Divinity dwells bodily.'" I think that, from what we have seen this evening, we are starting to understand that what we hold most dear is not obvious. Many times we are surprised to find out that what we hold most dear is not exactly Christ Himself, but other things that are consequences, not His presence, not His person. The Poster, then, is a judgment, a reminder of what Christianity is. By having it in front of us all year long, we hope, as we had said at the presentation of the School of Community, that our desire for Christ may grow more and more. And this is connected to what we were saying this evening: we will desire nothing else but this, if we understand what it is that we need. If, instead, our need is reduced, we will do without it and settle for something less than Him.

The Book of the month for March is *The Master and Margarita* by Bulgakov.

We have proposed this novel because, in connection with the School of Community we are doing, it can help us meditate on the importance of Christ's historic evidence which can be verified through facts and their consequences.

On the February issue of *Traces* and on its website you can find a presentation and an article that can help you read and understand the imaginary creations of the novel itself.

Veni Sancte Spiritus