

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, January 11, 2012**

Reference text: The Religious Sense, chapter XIV, pp. 132-140.

Song: "Parsifal (Song of the ideal)"

Song: "Mandulinata a Napule"

Happy New Year to all of you! What could be better than this chapter of *The Religious Sense* to start off the year! Because there is no other chapter that is so, let's say, dizzying, that expresses so well reason's 'yearning' (this is the word used by Fr. Giussani) to be able to know the unknown. It is the same yearning we have just perceived in this Neapolitan song, this tension to "enter the mystery implied by appearance." This is what Ulysses and his companions felt. But this position is folly for the 'wisdom' of the common mentality. Therefore, each of us faces this struggle between what is human (that is, the religious sense) and what is not human (that is, the positivist position). It is the struggle we all live in every moment in our relationship with reality: living the Pillars of Hercules as a limit or as an invitation. This is life's drama.

When I read this chapter I felt an enormous sense of disproportion. I told myself, "the nature of my humanity is to go beyond, but is it really true?" I kept re-reading the chapter, but this question stayed within me. I ended up somewhat suppressing it, telling myself that in my opinion that is not my nature. Then I left for the holidays and a friend came to visit me braving the trip through the snow. She was very happy and that evening she went to bed and sent me a beautiful message that read, "But who is the one who loves me so much to let me be welcomed like this?" I answered her, "I envy you," telling her why the next day. She had reached the beyond, like this chapter is saying. Afterwards, I met a lady who helps me clean my house and she was telling me that she had been to Venice with her daughter (who had never seen the sea before), and how her daughter had burst into tears saying, "How beautiful is this sea; what is it, to be so vast?" It was another repercussion, because I told myself, "also in her (who is not Christian) her humanity went beyond, so what Fr. Giussani told us is really true: that our humanity is made to go beyond. Therefore, I became aware of the fact that there is something that blocks my humanity preventing it from going beyond. I spent fifteen days of vacation realizing that if I had gone beyond they wouldn't have been a time of complaint or a time of difficulty. I would like to understand if there is something that blocks this nature of my humanity.

There is something that blocks it. In fact, even if at times one doesn't feel like going beyond – justifying it by saying, 'that's not who I am' – reality re-proposes the question putting in front of her people who witness and document with a disarming simplicity that it is not like that, that it is not possible to consider it a done deal so quickly. The question to ask is: why do we feel blocked? Our friend is not talking about an experience we don't have; what she has the courage to say in front of everybody is what sometimes we don't dare to admit even to ourselves! So, what is blocking us, even if we have the resource of a chapter like this, a proposal like this, all of us who have encountered Christ? This is the problem: we are not talking only about people who lived before Christ; we are talking about all of us experiencing this struggle. This is why the question she asks is totally right, because it makes us face an issue we have to tackle, since it is our very own struggle. Let's not think that we are immune to positivism only because we are able to explain what it is! It is not enough to free ourselves from it. In fact, we can see how in reality we find ourselves immersed in this positivism, so

much so that instead of being an invitation, reality becomes a limit that blocks us. Let us leave the question open.

This chapter of The Religious Sense is probably my favorite. It always fascinated me, also esthetically, perhaps for its reference to Dante's Ulysses that always struck me. During the time you assigned to us to work on it, I re-read it many times and I was struck by the fact that I found myself agreeing with it, even enthusiastically, but I was not seeing any 'shift' in me, which also made me a little concerned. Then, the other day, as I was participating in a meeting with you, at one point I asked you a question regarding a situation on which I had made a particular judgment, and you told me (regarding the fact that I had said, "I believe this is right, it seems to me that this is wrong"), "No. Listen, you have to go and ask that person this question, "What is the true need behind this problem of yours?" I was very struck by your remark, because it made me perceive chapter XIV no longer as a discourse, but as something that moves me in the way I live, to the point that the next day I re-read it influenced by this shift in position your remark had provoked in me and I started to get into it. I think I understood that my Mediterranean Sea is the way I continue to claim 'this is right, this is wrong' (in the end this is how I always approach life), whereas it is a presence that makes you experience again that you are Ulysses; and you don't go beyond the Pillars of Hercules of the Mediterranean just talking about the Ocean, but because the Ocean, present, makes you experience again the totality of your need. I felt that what you suggested I say to that person is something also for myself: it was Christ present that was making me feel again the depth of my need (which I always reduce), as you told us in the article in L'Osservatore Romano at Christmas. Therefore, suddenly that chapter didn't describe any longer what I should be, but what I am. I was struck by the fact that yesterday afternoon, as I was talking to a friend I love deeply to whom I told many times what was the right thing to do, I found myself telling him, "What is the need that moves you in this instance?" re-using right away, almost unaware, the same words you had addressed to me on Monday, recognizing in both of us this yearning that dictates every move we make, both right and wrong. Or, I was struck this morning in class – I am talking about Nazism – where I spoke about the young Germans of the White Rose, challenging my students to start from this need for totality. I hadn't thought of speaking about this because I had already made the judgment that they wouldn't understand. I was deeply struck by the fact that since you had made me "Ulysses" once again, I looked at them like Ulysses.

What is our positivism? The fact that we try to stop there, defining what is right and what is wrong. This is not the existential position that introduces that dizzying experience in life, because this chapter says that what rules man's life is being suspended towards a will I don't know. On p.135 Fr. Giussani writes that this is the only reasonable, rational position: "The true moral law [what expresses best who we are] would be that of waiting for the nod of this unknown 'lord', attentive to the signs of a will that would appear to us through the pure, immediate circumstance. I repeat [he insists!]: man, the human being's rational life, would have to be suspended on the instant, suspended in every moment upon this sign, apparently so fickle, so haphazard, yet the circumstances through which the unknown 'lord' drags me, provokes me toward his design." But we think that this 'lord' is crazy! We think that we are the measure of what this 'lord,' if only he were as intelligent as we are, should do! Furthermore, since we are continually provoked by something we don't understand, something that takes us beyond and beyond and beyond, in a way that seems totally unreasonable to us, we think that living suspended like this is the craziest thing one could do. On the contrary, Fr. Giussani continues, "To say 'yes' to every instant [...] simply adhering to the pressures of the occasions. It is a dizzying position," this is the true nature of the religious man. But who can live like this? Maybe for a few moments, but then we cannot

sustain it. A person wrote to me telling me how she is living a certain circumstance: “I am starting from a fact that happened on the first of September of this year, a dear friend who was close to getting married, a woman of rare intelligence and sensitivity, had a stroke. She fought death for about two months. I was overwhelmed by this because of my friendship with her and her family, but also professionally, because I am a doctor. I went through various phases. First I tried to elude the urgency of the questions that the magnitude of this fact was raising, by simply taking care of the medical and logistical details: I made my home available, I kept track of all the medical issues, etc. I was going to the Intensive Care Unit having a hard time to face her empty eyes or those of her relatives, full of questions, and I was running away with the excuse of having to go and see the X-Rays or other tests. In short, I was trying to avoid the blow dedicating myself to ‘socially useful’ activities. However, I didn’t last very long, because the situation got worse and the ‘distraction’ provided by my role as doctor couldn’t suppress any more the question for meaning that this mysterious fact was provoking. Then an intense, relentless dialogue with the Mystery started. I accepted to, or perhaps I was forced to let myself be wounded. The awareness of the vibration of being became the fabric of my day as never before. I also experienced that when life is lived as a continuous and vibrant awareness of the Mystery it takes on a new intensity. I became more passionate about the value of my job, about the destiny of my children, of my husband. It is true that things were hurting me more, but living this way makes everything more intense. However –I am starting with the ‘buts’ – I realized that this is not enough. Remaining in this dizzying position, which by the way is almost impossible to sustain for long, in the end was giving rise to a feeling of rebellion against this being without a name and a face. I started to experience the urgent need for something that would say to me, “Woman do not weep!” and would say it in a tender and convincing way. I started to feel the need for someone who would propose to me a concrete road, without taking anything away from the perception of the Mystery, but that at the same time would make me taste the beauty of His bending over our lives. In the very moment I was desiring this, maybe even before, it did happen [some people accompanied her in this situation]. If nobody had bent over me saying, “Woman do not weep!” sincerely I couldn’t have cared less for this extremely vivid awareness of a Mystery without a face. These facts did not take away from me the sense of the Mystery that remains more vivid than ever in front of the tortured body and mind of my friend. When I came to Beginning Day, where for two consecutive hours you spoke about the vibration of being, I felt your call to us was lacking meaning; ultimately it seemed to me sad and suffocating. Facing life so full of drama I thought, “why does Carron keep talking only of this relationship of the individual with the Mystery and he doesn’t introduce us, addressing it only indirectly, to the hypothesis of an answer? What is the sense of this method? It seems as if the apex of everything is to discover the relationship with a faceless Someone who makes reality. But this is not enough for me, as it is not enough for my patients and friends who are suffering; we would only give in to despair. If this faceless God who makes everything had not come to earth making himself a companion and piercing through pain and sorrow, like that of my friend or mine, reality would not make sense and it could not be somehow positive. I know I am exaggerating and that on January 26th you didn’t say this, but sincerely I feel that this insistence on these aspects has favored some irrational deviations as if – one could say – Christ and reason were opposed to each other. Reality can be a lot more beautiful, but even tragic and painful if I am not overcome by rampant cynicism and I can preserve a pure position (something very difficult in and of itself if you are by yourself). At most, I can perceive the existence of Someone without a face Who makes this reality, but then, in the end, frustrated and disappointed like everybody else, I would fall a thousand times because I would not be able to stand this vertigo. So it is absurd to continue to create this opposition between the perception of the Mystery, the inexorable positivity of reality,

and the undeniable need for Revelation. Yet, our community is splitting up because of this useless dichotomy. It seems to me that what is suggested to us as a model is a protestant relationship with a God without a face Who in the end takes on the features of what is more convenient for me or, even worse, of a sick projection of my thought.” Each one of us can judge if this was the proposal on January 26th... Because on January 26th my starting point was actually the opposite: the Christian encounter, the fact of Christ as a real experience. Giussani has always told us that we don’t start from our natural religious sense, but from the Christian announcement. You can tell that the Christian announcement has become part of a man from the fact that it reawakens his original needs. This is where I started from, and this was how my lesson evolved. In the fourth point, which is the one I am interested in now, to connect it to today’s chapter, we were saying: “Only a Christianity that preserves its original nature, its unmistakable traits of contemporaneous historical presence – the contemporaneousness of Christ –, can be equal to the real need of men and women, and is therefore able to save the religious sense,” that is, the possibility to enter any circumstance however dizzying it may be. And we had added: “‘Christ is so beautiful that He draws me totally!’ [...]. This beauty, as splendor of the truth, is the only thing able to reawaken people’s desire and to move their affection so powerfully as to make continually possible the openness of their reason to the reality before them [...]. Christ’s contemporaneousness thus allows reason all its openness, enabling it to reach an intelligence of reality unknown before. All things, all circumstances, even the most banal, are exalted, become signs, “speak,” are interesting to live. The person awakened in this way and sustained by the presence of Christ can finally live as a religious person [so much so that we had entitled this last point: “Christ Saves the Religious Sense”: and so, to continue to contrast the two things goes against what I said!], can endure the vertigo of life, circumstance after circumstance [any circumstance].” And later I was saying: “Thus, Christ’s contemporaneousness is indispensable for living the religious sense fully, that is to say, for having the right attitude before reality,” to be able to live this vertigo of life that we are not spared, not even after the Incarnation, as described by the letter that I just read to you. Without the recognition of Christ’s contemporaneousness what is lacking is this drive of the religious sense. Why does Fr. Giussani insist on the use of reason? Why does the Pope insist on the use of reason? Are they protestant too? I think this is too much! Actually, here we come back to what our first speaker earnestly told us this evening: one can stay in front of reality after Christ without the drama being reawakened in front of reality. Fr. Giussani explained this during a conference in 1985: “We Christians in today’s environment have not been detached from Christian formulas, directly, not from Christian rituals, directly, not from the laws of the Ten Commandments, directly. We have been detached from the human foundation, from the religious sense. We have a faith that is no longer religiosity. We have a faith that no longer responds to the religious sense as it should; that is, we have a faith that is not aware, a faith that is no longer intelligent of itself.” When Fr. Giussani says this, is he or is he not talking about something that we can all recognize in our life? After Christ we can be flat, as we can know Christian formulas and yet not have the sense of the Mystery. It’s evident that without this human foundation being constantly re-awakened in us, reality won’t speak to us. If a witness helps us, then reality will begin to speak to us, as this letter says: “At the end of the last School of Community, as I got back home and saw my wife, I told her that after what I had heard from you and felt as a repercussion, no circumstance could knock me down any more. It was totally clear. I was very convinced that there could not be any circumstance where one could not recognize the presence of One Who will never leave me. After just five days back at work there was a union dispute that may result in many people losing their job. Although I have been a union representative for many years, and although I have unfortunately already gone through these situations in the past, in that occasion I felt completely paralyzed. I have lived this same

Christmas season with an indescribable emptiness. My wife, naturally, exactly on New Year's Eve stops me and asks: "But what is happening to you? Wasn't it you who just a few days ago were saying that no circumstance could ever again knock you down?" I couldn't answer. Because of what had happened at work, I felt such an emptiness inside that I could not fill with speeches, with will power or by thinking about my family, not even about my grandchild or even about my responsibility within the movement. For the first time, I think, I did not take a step backward by filing everything away. I went forward, all the way to the end, starting precisely from that immense emptiness, from that lack; I had to stick to it. And it was there, from a lack that nobody could fill, that I started to feel again His embrace, so much so that I was able to face even the union dispute with unexpected gladness. I don't know if I am mistaken, and in this please correct me, but without the work on reason that you have been leading us on for some time, at the end I would have easily set aside the whole circumstance without putting up a fight. However, precisely by going deeper, without leaving anything out, into that crevice that was gradually becoming an abyss, and that was making me feel so bad, I started to live again, and to feel once more God's tenderness towards me: he doesn't get scandalized by my weakness, he goes beyond it, thank goodness." If when we are facing circumstances, which we are not spared, even after our encounter, we cannot face reality in this way, little by little we won't be able to see Christ as the One Who wins over circumstances, and Who can generate a new creature, a different person who can enter into reality. And in the end it is absolutely impossible to live the contents of this 14th chapter. But we cannot live it by ourselves. We need to be constantly generated; we constantly need Christ's contemporaneity to be able to enter any circumstance with profound peace and gladness, which is what Christ Himself witnessed to us. Christ did not withdraw from reality, but entered into reality, unlike this other friend who says (I am going to read and then reply): "I have been having a hard time for several weeks now. I am about to lose my job, I don't know yet if it's a question of weeks or a few months, but it's certain. This unexpected and unjust fact has discouraged me and caused me to panic. In these circumstances I sank. In these last few months I have prayed, I have asked, I have followed. In this instant, as I decide to write to you, I am asking to be able to recognize Him. In many moments of my day I feel like He doesn't answer me, not so much because my problem is not solved, but because I can't stay in the circumstance sustained by His presence. It's as if He remained a premise [and a premise cannot give support: if Christianity is a premise, if Christianity is just a doctrine, if Christianity is just a set of rules that we already know, it's not enough to enter into reality]. He doesn't seem to be a presence within my repulsion towards my situation at work. But without Him I can't stay standing, not even when I am with my friends or in my wife's arms; nothing is truly enough. I don't know why He allows all this: being left without a job, discouragement...I have no answer. For me it's mysterious, but I'd like to be able to say sincerely that it is for my own good [this is the desire, what one desires for oneself]. I'd like to be able to say it, to be able to adhere to this circumstance, to this absolutely banal modality through which the Mystery is calling me. I can say it, but, honestly, I often don't believe it. I can't repeat Fr. Kolbe's words: 'I am not asking you for an instruction manual. I am asking you to sustain my journey.' This morning, after reciting Morning Prayer poorly and doing School of Community poorly too, I said: Lord, teach me how to pray, because 'nobody who is called to look above is able to lift one's own eyes.' Christ is there, but I have a hard time recognizing Him and staying attached to Him. It's unbelievable, but He is not the thing I desire the most, I am left floating." This is our drama, the drama of each one of us. But what has Christ witnessed to us? What has the man Christ done in front of us? He entered the circumstances without withdrawing, without floating. How? By Himself? No: through the absolute and indestructible bond with the Father, to Whom He wants to introduce us too! Jesus does not stop at appearances, he doesn't argue in the Olive Garden or with Pilate, or

Herod, or the Synedrium: He has a dialogue with the Father. Christ has entered history, and from that moment on we are never alone. Without this awareness, we can only deceive ourselves about being able to live as religious men, or even to be together; but the real issue is this dialogue to which Christ introduced us, so that we can be children in the Son, and stay so powerfully attached to Him so that we may live any circumstance as children, without any suspicion, any doubt about our relationship with the Father. So this shows us what else we need to do so that this certainty in our relationship with Christ doesn't come short of reason, affection, or freedom, but rather makes them really possible. This is impossible without Christ, but Christ is not reducible to how we say: "Christ," because, then, in front of reality, we constantly see that it's not enough. So, either Christ – as we have been saying during all these months – is something that is happening now in the Christian community, and so we can enter any circumstance, or it is impossible to face reality in a fully human way. Christ makes it possible for me to live life with all my reason, with all my humanity. He is the only One able to save the religious sense. Otherwise, anything that upsets us is enough to knock us down. This is the verification we need to do: is Christ able to generate such a person? Is the Christian experience in history able to generate such a person, a new creature? This is the question. This is the work ahead of us.

Next time – which will be **Wednesday, January 25th** at 9:30 pm – we'll have the presentation of the text of the new School of Community, which is the second volume of the Trilogy, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, by Fr. Giussani. The presentation – which will be a CL public meeting where you can invite everybody – will be webcasted from Milan, like last year.

Up until now we have had our satellite connection every two weeks, witnessing a method on how to do School of Community. After the presentation of January 25th, we'll have a meeting more or less every month to verify the work done, so that each of us can compare one's own work (with the groups you usually get together with) with what will happen at the end of every month during our satellite connection. This is intended to benefit your personal work, as I had mentioned at the beginning.

Please find attached to the January issue of *Traces* a **booklet** with the text of the **Clu Exercises**.

We wanted to make it available for everyone, to help us become more aware of what it means that reality is positive, because we had long debates about this issue. It is a brief attempt to answer these questions: how is reality positive? How does Christ save reason, re-awakens reason, and is able to generate a person who can use reason in a different way in front of reality.

On **Saturday, February 11th 2012**, the Banco Farmaceutico is organizing the 11th National Medicine Drive in about 3,000 pharmacies. I ask you to please make this initiative known to everyone and to participate in this simple charitable gesture as volunteers in the pharmacies. The medicines that will be collected will make it possible to help 1,200 Italian associations which assist 400,000 needy people. For any information and clarifications, please consult the following website www.bancofarmaceutico.org

Veni Sancte Spiritus