

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Rome, October 26, 2011

Reference text: The Religious Sense, chapter 10, pp. 100-109. “To Live Always the Real Intensely”, *Traces*, no. 9, 2011, pp. I-XVI (Page One).

Song: “Il Mistero”

Song: “Alecrim”

Glory Be

As we continue our work on School of Community, I would like to start by reading some of the letters that touch on the sore spot of the difficulty we often have. A person writes me, “The awe of the presence is clear to me. I am struck by nature, I am amazed by my wife and my children, and a beautiful afternoon spent with friends amazes me, arousing in me a sincere gratitude for what is given to me. Beautiful things call me back to their Creator. However, distraction and worries cast a veil on this judgment: difficulties at work, relationships at work, often marked by a single criterion of judgment, that is, how profitable my work is (try to imagine how much there is to be cheerful about in the current situation), performance-related stress, lack of understanding at home, the uncertainty about the future. In short, the hardship of daily life shows me how much the attraction to reality is instead vacillating and fluctuating. This results in a lack of interest for things and a growing sadness and inability to recognize a positivity in all of reality, even that which seems to be hostile. It is certainly a problem of having little faith that I would like to correct, but I am asking how it is for you, and if you can help us to make a step forward.” This seems to describe well the predicament everybody is in: we cannot deny that in certain moments we were struck or amazed by reality, but then all the difficulties, the distractions, the preoccupations, the difficulties at work, the relationships, etc., “cast a veil on this judgment.” Then the result is clear: I am not interested in things, I become sad. If this prevails we end up living like everybody else: when things go well everything is fine, when things don’t go well we feel badly. In the end, what is brought into question in this situation is the judgment: ultimately, is reality truly positive or not? Is it true that all these things cast a veil on judgment, or not? The letter ends saying that “certainly it is a problem of having little faith.” What do you think about it? I say: no, it’s not a problem of faith, it’s a problem of reason! This is the fundamental challenge of chapter 10 to each of us. When the entire tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* says that reality, in all its substance and with all its imposing presence, is positive, is it affirming something true or not? This is the judgment we have to make, otherwise we depend on how things are going, and then “the hardship of daily life shows me how much the attraction to reality is instead vacillating and fluctuating.” This is why a radical question comes up: is reality truly positive or not? Does it depend on how things are going? We already know that if it depends on how things are going, when they go well things are fine, but the problem is when they are not going well (as they often don’t)! So, are we visionaries when we say that reality is positive? Each one of us can compare him or herself with what Fr. Giussani says, because this is what doing School of Community is. Can we say, feeling at peace and with certainty, using reason to its fullest, that reality is positive, or do we find ourselves fluctuating, like this letter says? How do we react in front of circumstances? Facing an illness or the economic crisis, when relationships are difficult, or facing things at home, are we really convinced that reality is positive, or do we continue to repeat it only out of a kind of persistent willpower (“We have to say it because we are in the Movement, because we are Christians”)? Can we affirm it with a full use of reason? Is the challenge

clear? We cannot back down from this, because if we do not do this work, even if we come here every two weeks we are not going to solve this problem (and then our judgment will depend on how things are going...). Does the judgment depend only on the fluctuations of our emotions? Is it true that this sheet of paper is white, or does it depend on the mood I am in when I look at it? A judgment: can my illness, a toothache, or the fact that I lost my job bring into question the truth of a judgment? If we say that a veil is cast on judgment, it means that we haven't learned yet what a judgment is. This is why we want to understand well what a judgment is. Because reality exists; no matter what it looks like, it does exist and this doesn't depend on the mood we are going through at any given moment. Therefore, this means that we have to re-learn certain things we say: what is a judgment (because as soon as something happens in our life, we see how it is not clear what it is). Why? This second letter says it very well, "Dear Julián, when I re-read Beginning Day I realized that what eludes me above all is going to the core of reason to reach the real You from whom I spring. Often I don't experience the repercussion and I am not even aware of it, but many times I do. What is the use of reason you are talking about? I dare to say that it is a use that I don't know. In my experience the step from the repercussion to the You, from the rushing stream to the spring itself, remains abstract. Sometimes, in certain circumstances the real You imposes himself on my life, but it doesn't last. Nothing seems able to permanently free me from my structural uncertainty; no husband, no child of mine, no sky, no leaf, not even pain and sorrow. The Event does happen, tearing me away from my suffocating ideas, opening me wide to the beauty of life, to Christ's love, to gratitude for being saved a thousand times; yes, I am reawakened, for a while, but I would say that then it shuts down again. Things are better when I am faithful to daily Mass, but not even that is decisive [because many times we 'use' Mass to avoid using reason]. I have a hard time imagining that there is a way of using reason that can bring change, that can work in the flesh, affecting everything, also the dimension of my "I". That break remains." I think that this describes the difficulty clearly. Why? Because this use of reason is unknown to us. When we speak of 'positivism' we are not using a complicated word, far removed from our experience; we are describing what we experience many times: a use of reason that stops at appearance. This is why the step from the repercussion to the You, from the rushing stream to the spring itself, remains abstract, and we think that saying, "You" is something that we add on to reality because we are a bit visionaries. Also, since we affirm this You only out of will ("Because we decide it"), it doesn't last. If I say, "This sheet of paper is white," I am acknowledging something; I can rest and relax because it will also be white five years from now. This sheet of paper doesn't have to be white because I claim it is white, as if without my claiming it, it would stop being white. Imagine if from this we could come to say: from the repercussion to the You, from the rushing stream to the spring itself. In fact, how many times we raise the objection, "But why do I have to add the You?"; it seems like a complication – we were saying it at Beginning Day - , it seems that saying, "You," is something we add on out of a willful habit (while others who don't have the same habit we have use the word "Nothing," "Nothingness"). Do you see how we can be here and yet not make this step , not do this work? If we don't accept Fr. Giussani's proposal to use reason in a true way and to its fullest, then in front of reality we always have this structural uncertainty (our friend's intuition is terribly accurate: then there is neither husband nor child of mine, neither sky nor leaf that can give me the certainty I don't have). Then you understand what connection there is between the encounter with Christ and the use of reason! If the encounter with Christ doesn't reawaken reason and it isn't an introduction to the totality of reality – we are together to learn to use reason in this way, to help and sustain each other in this use of reason according to its true nature - everything we do, even coming here every two weeks, is useless because it isn't able to substantially change us; eventually, we will lose interest in it, because if after a while one doesn't change, he loses

interest even in the very thing he claims to have, that is, faith. This is why a faith that doesn't make us use reason differently, not only leaves us positivists, but it makes us skeptical, since faith is not able to reawaken a person's full ability to recognize reality. Then, one has to ask himself this question: does the presence of things (the fact that things exist) really imply the existence of something else? Let's start to use reason! Or is it just a matter of speaking? Let's start from the easiest example we have made many times, that of the flowers. Does the presence of a bouquet of flowers on your table imply that someone else gave them to you or not? Are you inventing the presence of the person you love, or does the bouquet of flowers imply something else? Are we the ones to create the presence of reality, does reality generate itself, or does it imply something else? Either we start to ask ourselves these simple questions, to avoid being trapped in a reductive use of reason, or in the end our faith will always be something added onto an 'I' – as I always say – already perfectly constituted, as a hat on my head, which honestly is a decoration, it doesn't change neither my way of looking nor the reality of things. This is why the majority of people can do without this hat, because in the end it is an additional decoration, it is not crucial for living. This is the verification we have been engaged in since January 26: either Christianity has the ability to reawaken reason, enabling it to recognize reality as it is, or we remain permanently uncertain; but then the division remains, as another letter says, "There is something else gnawing at me; it is the fluctuation of affectivity [if we don't arrive to touch reality at its origin, our affectivity keeps fluctuating]. I want to understand how to face the things that determine me at the level of affection, so that they may speak to me more of the Presence that makes them, revealing His face to me." In fact, if we don't get to the point of taking hold of reality, our affectivity fluctuates: now it's like this, then after five minutes it's like that, and we remain at the mercy of everything. This is why if I don't start to learn a correct use of reason instead of just repeating phrases, when things get rough, when I start suffocating in the circumstances, I am lost. Is this everything or – also here – does the fact that I exist, me, truly me, albeit suffocating and not laughing, in this particular predicament, does it imply a You who makes me? Because it is then that I start looking at myself as wanted by Another, regardless of how I feel. Precisely because I recognize this I can change the feeling. Instead, we think in the opposite way, that first we have to change the feeling because this is what convinces me that my 'I' exists. No, it is reason that convinces me that my 'I' exists, and this is why I can change the feeling! But we invert the terms and so we remain victims of the fluctuations of our feelings and we are always at the mercy of everything. Where does this lack of knowledge take us? This other letter describes it, "I decided to write to you because I think I have gotten to a point in my work on School of Community in which I'm stuck. I am starting from my experience. I am currently retired, my children are grown up, I don't have grandchildren, and I certainly have the possibility of spending my time in the way that suits me best, we could say like during a long vacation. I committed myself to help people who may need me – I am a doctor – training nurses, doing consultations, etc... I am happy to do all these things, nobody forced me, I chose to do it freely, but afterwards this question came up: can all these commitments I am involved in be the meaning of my day? The answer is no. They are not the meaning of my day, but even if I did something else...I want to say that not even the relationship with my children is the meaning of my day; I realize that I desire something else, something great, something that may correspond to my heart completely, and in the morning I get up desiring that this great thing may happen to me. However, the point is this: for Christ to be a true experience it has to happen here and now, I have to meet Him now, I live waiting for it to happen now, but I don't meet Him in what I am living, and this to me seems like a contradiction. I am not afraid of my desire for the Infinite, because through the work of School of Community I truly understood that the perception of missing something is a positive thing (because one is aware of missing something that he has already

known and experienced, not something he doesn't know). Tell me what work I can continue to do in order to become more and more true?" Do you see how we don't see the present things as presence? This friend says that she perceives her desire for the Infinite. She has started to understand, but she hasn't understood completely yet. Why is this desire for the Infinite a positive thing, why? Because she has experienced and known something. The desire for the Infinite is already the first sign of His presence, but she is not aware of this. Since we don't use reason according to its nature, we don't make this step from repercussion to You, from the rushing stream to the spring itself, from recognizing the desire for the Infinite to recognizing the One Who is giving me this desire for the Infinite, Who reawakens it in me continuously (because many people at her age, retired, are already totally skeptical). Is having such an intense desire for the Infinite something we give ourselves, or is it something present as presence? This is the way in which I start to recognize that there is One who is still reawakening me. Because, as we were saying last time, if one is facing such an imposing desire for the Infinite he has to honestly ask himself: but can we, who are poor wretches, reawaken this desire for the Infinite on our own? Or is this the first sign of His presence? This means that on this point we still have an enormous amount of work to do, as this last letter says, "Finally I understood the point that blocked me for years [and what was the point?]. I always used my religious belief and the words of the movement as an alibi to avoid the work. More or less unconsciously, the fact of thinking and knowing the answer to my human need, Jesus Christ, blocked my search. I was repeating 'Christ' without really looking for Him. I already knew Him, and this made Him become ever more foreign and "unlikable" to me [look at the consequence!], while I, on the other hand, was becoming more skeptical, nearsighted and disappointed [a faith without religious sense, a faith that instead of awakening the religious sense flattens it because I think I already know, brings to skepticism, nearsightedness and disappointment]. I remember how I reacted years ago to the title of the Fraternity Exercises "Christ in His beauty draws me to Him". Secretly I asked myself, "But where?" He was never answering to my nostalgia and His claim kept becoming more and more unbearable because it was disappointing. I stayed in the movement partly out of habit, but especially because, thank heaven, you and other friends never stop to make vibrate in me that which I discovered to be my deepest 'I', where my whole self is present, and I am well aware I cannot face it by myself. Your continuous insistence made me understand that there truly is at stake the possibility of something great for me, and I decided to follow. By really following I understood that I had never followed, because honestly I had never been interested in discovering anything, neither about myself nor about reality. I was always content with other people's conviction [as if repeating what others were discovering]. But this is not enough for the heart. I looked at myself in action: what a fright! Artificial, not free in my relationships, always looking for a consent [because if one doesn't discover something true he is always looking for the consent of others], stuck on myself, merciless in my judgment of others. Following. I took School of Community and its announcements seriously and so I started to spend time reading the texts attentively and I tried to attend the gestures proposed as much as possible. Following. Prayer: I started to go to Mass daily, asking that He reveal my and His true face. The origin of all this 'following' was and continues to be the sincere asking that something of myself and of reality may be revealed to me [what sets us in motion? The awareness of our need: when we are really aware of the need we start moving.] The impact-encounter with reality showed me my powerlessness to hold on to what's dear to me. I am incapable of saving anything in my day, and the people I love slip away, I am forced to look for something that may save me and my dear ones. Living with this kind of commitment [committed like this!] my day has become interesting, the suggestions given have become an authoritative starting point, it would be stupid to ignore them. The words I read and hear speak to my searching and I look for their companionship [she starts looking

for the companionship that helps her in this]. I am still hesitant, but I find the courage to discuss certain questions with some friends, without worrying about saying the right thing, but eager to discover the connection between Him and me. I detach myself from the image I built of myself and I find myself free in my relationships with others. The adventure has started again [it happens like this: the adventure starts again when we let ourselves be generated by the charisma, that is, when we take it seriously, when we simply start following]. Everything has become interesting again and each instant is a step [pay attention here: the instants are steps of the journey], no longer confused moments. And I discover with surprise that I'm looking at myself with tenderness, no longer with fright, and I am moved by the fact that I could even fall in love with the One who is able to make me feel so at peace with myself. And since I wrote to you, I take this opportunity to ask you to confirm this." But she has the confirmation right there, in the very experience she is having. As Fr. Giussani says, faith is a present experience in which one finds confirmation of the truth of the experience he is having, as it happened to her: the adventure has started again. Reality has become interesting, the suggestions are a starting point, every instant is a step; she doesn't need an 'external' confirmation from the authority, because the authority, following, is in the experience she is having, and in her case we can see it so clearly. At the beginning, she was partially deferring to the external authority, because it wasn't yet part of her person, while now you can see that the authority is part of the experience. Where do we see this? In the fact that the experience changes. It is recognizable in the experience itself. Why? Because the experience is completely different. As I always say, "the ingredients are the same, but the soup is different." Where do we see it? In the experience itself. She sums it up with one word: following. The experience changes. Before it was following without taking the proposal seriously – not that she was against it, or that she was doing something different; she simply didn't take seriously the working hypotheses in order to verify them -. Since at one point, because of her need, she started to take them seriously, then the amazement began. The amazement: because for her it is amazing to think that the adventure that before was blocked is now beginning. It is striking to read these letters of yours, because they say better than any explanation what life is. Very normal people, like each of us, who simply take what we say seriously and start to verify it, to win, to answer to everything, using reason in a different way, without fluctuating like before, experiencing a fullness and an intensity previously unknown. I am saying this because it is a hope for each of us; it isn't a special person who is saying it, but someone like us. What is the difference? Not the role, not the position, not the responsibility she has, but the fact that in her simplicity she is taking the proposal seriously, and then what I just read happens. I am the first to be left speechless in front of what happens in people when they start – as she said – to follow.

I wanted to try to tell you how the work of School of Community is clarifying my experience of returning to school after a year of absence. I discovered that using reason in a non-reduced way has something to do with the possibility of experiencing a continuous newness and a new beginning in the very instant. During the first days when I was back in school I was very concerned, partly because I was afraid of not being able to make it physically, and partly because I suspected that returning to normal life was a lesser way of living reality intensely. After the exceptional facts that had happened to me during the previous year regarding my illness, I was afraid that going back to normal life could somehow be something less. Then, when at the last School of Community you told us that Christianity is the subversive and amazing way of living ordinary things, I understood that I had already 'killed' Beginning day and I was somewhere else, and all this made me question myself a lot about my going back to work. It is true that I was getting more tired, but this forced me to verify every day that aspect of the circumstance, because I had never been as aware as I am

now that if I can stand is because I am leaning on Another, and I see this every morning precisely when I go to school. Then little by little I started to observe myself in action, and I noticed that in comparison with the past this year there were many things that I was doing differently: tests, correcting homework, dealing with some particularly difficult students. I started asking myself why. Last year I didn't attend any professional development courses, I wasn't concerned about my teaching method, and going back to school I hadn't made any plans to change something. However, I discovered that the change depended on the fact that I had become much more certain due to all that I had seen; that as I enter the classroom there is One who is winning and first of all I am called to recognize this. This freed me from the suspicion that ordinary life couldn't be an opportunity to live reality intensely; furthermore, it made me see the unity of two things that for me were divided, that is, my illness and my work, which for me were always an open contradiction: I couldn't understand how they could be linked. The other thing I am finding out is that, for my job, a true use of reason consists in the possibility to start over again in the instant. This happens often to me, exactly from one instant to the next. In the moment when I realize that I am You- Who-Make-Me, this opens up again a possibility that otherwise, would easily decay. I am finding out that, even though I am not one who gives up in front of challenges, there is a way of not giving up which is adding your own proposition on reality. After a while this leaves you sort of breathless, because, in any case, even though things go well, your proposition, your plan, gives you anxiety and wears you out. And in any case, your plan exasperates the other, because in this way you don't look at the person in front of you, but, rather, you go after whom or what you have in mind. Something happened last week that clarified this for me. The day of that terrible storm in Rome I arrived at school half dead, like many other people in Rome, and at school it was total chaos (no power, students who arrived all disheveled). My first thought was: this day is wasted, because it's impossible to teach a lesson in these conditions. Then, realizing what I was saying, I understood that my reason had already been taken over by the rainstorm, because I was saying that there was nothing to do in that situation. And I said to myself: why shouldn't I treat these students here, who have been able to get to school, as a presence? What prevents me from doing so? From that moment on, some really beautiful things began to happen very simply during conversations in my history class or in my ordinary work. When I left school I was very happy, and not because I had been able to teach a class and so I had not wasted time, but because, using the same images you used last time, somehow I had gone through these turbulences: by taking a risk, and by wanting to treat that present situation as a presence, I had been able to feel happier even in days when there are many painful things that would normally make me suffer. And so even all the things I can't understand and that would make me suffer, these experiences I am living – with a widened use of reason – make me feel certain that, anyway, there is a point in which I am made in each instant. This sustains and frees me continuously.

And what does this awareness have to do with your sickness? Why was your sickness positive?

It was positive because in that circumstance that I did not choose, I really realized that there was Someone who was making me in the instant, and Who enabled me to constantly verify my faith even through this situation. Seeing that there was One Who kept me company changed me. It changed me in things concerning my job, not only concerning my sickness.

When we say that the circumstance is positive, we mean this. We are saying that it makes us more ourselves, so much so that we can live our normal life differently from before; any given circumstance is not just a passing moment that we have to bear. Rather, it introduces a new gaze upon myself, so much so that I can start teaching my class in a different way, and I can face ordinary life without the usual reduction. This is because the illness (or the difficulty) forced me not to stop at appearances and to use reason to live in a truer way. And

the evidence that you have learned this is that when a certain period of time is over, you continue to use reason differently: a new way of staying in reality has become your own.

*Recently I have often found myself becoming aware of things as present. For example, I am in a PhD program, and I am working with a student who behaves in a way that I can't stand. At a certain point, though, instead of looking at him expecting him to do what I wanted, I stopped and realized that he was there. I realized that all the things he was interested in, and which may have been less interesting to me, could be an opportunity also for me to learn from what he likes. But I didn't do anything to get to this position. So my question is this: how can I always be aware of things as present? What does it mean to educate reason to open up to the language of 'being'? While I was thinking about it, something happened to me that may have helped me understand a little about the answer to this question. I would like to ask for your help, though. Yesterday I was on the subway and I was reading *Beginning Day*; someone comes in playing the accordion and I started thinking: why did this guy have to come in here while I'm reading. Now he's going to disturb me. Initially I tried to focus on the text. Then, after a while, I thought: what is Carrón saying here? To become aware of things as present and I am not even taking this person into consideration; so I looked up and started to listen to him. I feel that doing *School of Community* seriously, somehow, helps me look at things as present. I would like to understand, though, whether there is something else, if it's like this, and if there is something else.*

It's like this if we don't stop at appearance. What does it mean to recognize present things as a presence? What does it mean that a leaf, that stays still right there and doesn't disturb you – and so cannot even force you to do a work because it doesn't disturb you, because it doesn't bother you –, cries out a presence? That we at least begin to glimpse present things without taking them for granted, trying to identify ourselves, to experience what life could become if I started to become aware that nothing should be taken for granted, nothing, nothing, nothing, I don't know what, nothing! I mean, looking at present things as presence. Instead of a leaf, think of any other circumstance, however painful, however suffocating, and even in that situation, try looking at present things as presence. Aren't things present even when you are stuck or suffocating? What a breath of fresh air would be brought in the instant in which we are suffocating, if we were to look at present things as presence! If we can't see this possibility, why do we do this? If we can't understand what we would gain in life by doing this work proposed by Fr. Giussani – which, as you see, is nothing else than what the Pope proposes to us –, we would never fill the distance that we feel between us and their educational concerns, it's terrible! Because immediately we tend to think that everything else is more important, yet they insist tirelessly on this. And we really have a hard time with this. This is why, if through the examples and witnesses that I am reading, we can't understand where people begin to see what this could mean for life, why do we do this? As we said at *Beginning Day*, if you suffocate, it's because you are a positivist. Period. Are you suffocating? Don't blame it on the circumstance, don't blame it on your husband or wife, don't blame it on your employer, and don't blame it on something outside of you! Are you suffocating? You positivist! Because your boss can be like this, your wife can be like this or your employer can be like this or a circumstance can be like this, but none of these things can prevent me from living this circumstance in a non positivist way, starting to breathe again. Otherwise the only thing that I can do is hope, wait, wait for something to happen that ... No, I can begin to live any circumstance in a different way because this is the novelty introduced by Christ! He introduced something new in life that enables me to use reason according to its true nature, so I begin to look at present things as presence, as Fr. Giussani says. Without this, what is the human advantage of faith? If, as a matter of fact, we were not promised to be spared the work everybody has to do, why should we waste time and stay here tonight. Why

should we stay here if not to help and support each other in a use of reason, in a way to live reality according to its true nature? The Pope said it: reason and nature in their correlation, because only a reason in its correlation with reality can be not reduced. And a reality in correlation with reason can be not suffocating. Without this, we live like everybody else, and Christianity is only something added on that doesn't change, as you were saying, ordinary life. But we have seen someone who could continue to cry out the positivity of reality even at the age of eighty, and we all know what kind of pain he was enduring. Such a witness can at the very least introduce a few cracks in our monolithic conviction! It introduces a desire to participate in this journey! We need to help each other and ask that this intuition become operative, so that we too can breathe in any circumstance like Fr. Giussani.

Our next School of Community will take place on Wednesday, **November 9th at 9:30 pm**. We will work on Chapter 11 of *The Religious Sense*, on which we had already worked at the Fraternity Exercises last year and on which you can resume your work.

As you have seen on the CL website, there is a new article in which the movement gives a judgment on the current situation in Italy: "The Crisis, Challenge for a Change". It documents what we are talking about. It's an attempt to look at reality based on what we said tonight, because we cannot say that reality is not positive when we look at the mountains or the stars, if we can't say this in front of the crisis! And so, what does this leaflet fundamentally say? We are already starting to receive reactions to this: "This judgment about the crisis has arrived as breath of fresh air. Finally, a concrete help to look at this thing that has not touched me personally yet, but which affects several people around me, and which appears threatening on the horizon. Above all I think it's a very clear example of what it means to look at present things as presence. We all know there is a crisis, but normally I go straight to the consequences: what to do, what strategy to adopt, what the next move should be, that is, I skip over what is given, what I have in front of my eyes, and I don't know its true nature. Instead our leaflet contains a very clear *incipit* [this is the challenge: reality is positive, first of all because it sets the person in motion; before any strategy a crisis is a fact that sets me in motion, and so it's an opportunity]. In our small School of Community group, we worked on this article about the current crisis and after a long discussion, what came out clearly is that in front of a crisis there can be two reactions. One looks at the crisis as an opportunity: reality is ultimately positive, and he sets in motion; the other gets angry and rebels [and goes down the streets attacking banks]. At a certain point in our discussion a friend asked: what is the difference between the two positions? Where does a position like the one described in the leaflet come from? I thought this was a crucial question, in particular because it brought to the light many of my reductions. Despite having in mind several facts in which I had found myself in an open position towards the reality in front me, in that moment, faced with his question I saw that I couldn't have answered except with theories, and actually, I realized that I would have reduced the question to a difference of psychological attitude; instead, that became my question". Many times we think that to do the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* is like a sort of psychological introspection, but are we kidding? Don't we have anything better to do? We are talking about the nature of reality, not about psychological introspection! We are talking about nature, reality and the "I". But when we hear Fr. Giussani say: "Going down to the core of *being*", we confuse it with a sort of psychological introspection – to say that we are really the ones "out of our mind," not the others!

So, what is the point, as this letter says, the most revolutionary and decisive point of this document "The Crisis, Challenge for a Change"? Right at the beginning, the article proposes and puts forward a different perspective, a different way to look at things which is precisely

the content of the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* and of *Beginning Day*: reality is positive. But as we can see from our first few conversations about it, reality is not positive for everyone, so much so that it's enough for another thing to appear for us to doubt and question everything, or to begin the fluctuation we have seen. This is why we defend ourselves from it, we curse it, we blame it, and we would like to run far away, deny it, and if it's not possible, hide from it. The true challenge, then, is this: why can we say that reality is positive? Because if we cannot say it with conviction, then in front of the crisis we remain silent, silent! We'll join the procession of those who complain – I hope not the procession of those who throw rocks in protest, but at least complaints –. But here we can see that we will not become a presence, if we, each one of us personally, and together as a community, don't face the challenge of reality, the challenge of this crisis. Otherwise, in front of our schoolmates, our colleagues, our friends who have lost their job or are going through a tough time, we don't open our mouth, because we don't know what to say. So, this is the most urgent problem for each one of us. Why can we say that reality is positive? Careful here, this is not a "catholic" interpretation of reality, as if saying: since we have a certain starting point, a pre-constituted idea, a religious pre-concept, we interpret reality as positive, even though it's actually negative. And this is why we can't say it to everyone, because others don't share our faith. On the other hand, others who don't have this same starting point will interpret it in a different way and can say that reality is negative, in other words they can call a spade a spade because they are not forced otherwise by their ideology. No! This is our challenge: this is not about "baptizing" reality, but rather to recognize it in its true nature. This is why it's really the verification of what we have been talking about. And when we read the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* or we have *Beginning Day*, we think they are "internal" moments, for personnel only, for those who are already convinced. But when it comes to reality we cannot say these things, we need to say other things. Now we have printed in a document a judgment in which we say the same things applied to reality; do they make sense or not? Because if they don't, it's not just the judgment in this article that doesn't make sense, but also *Beginning Day*, and not even the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*; is it clear? So this is the challenge that Fr. Giussani and the Pope carry forward, this is their battle: is the judgment that reality is positive true or not? You understand that we can't solve this simply by talking about it or with a sentimental companionship; nor with a way of staying together that spares us this use of reason. This doesn't mean that we need to do it individualistically; we need accompany each other in doing it, but accompanying each other so that it becomes personal, of each one of us, because otherwise we could not face this crisis. This is why we won't baptize or re-baptize anything, because this is about reason recognizing reality in its ultimate nature. Everything there is, because it has happened, because the Mystery has allowed it to happen – since everything has its origin in that You –, for the fact that it has happened, is a provocation to our life, i.e. an invitation to change, it's an occasion for taking a step towards destiny, it's for us, it's the way, it's an instrument of our journey, it's a sign. Let's say it: reality is sign. This is reality's ultimate nature. This crisis puts in front of everyone this challenge, in front of us and the others, because the challenge is for everyone.

This article talks about that Jewish-Christian tradition according to which reality is perceived as ultimately positive. Does this mean that it's something that we "add" because of our tradition? No. It's that our tradition, our faith, by re-awakening the religious sense, by re-awakening our reason, by re-awakening our capacity to stay in reality and to treat reality according to its true nature, enables us to perceive reality as positive because it is positive; this is different from adding something to reality as if we were visionaries: the fact that faith re-awakens the religious sense enables us to perceive reality according to its true nature. Reality is ontologically positive. The problem is that we give in to the temptation to interpret

in a sentimental and moralistic way the statement: “Reality is positive”, as if positive meant desirable or pleasant. And since there are circumstances, facts that we can’t identify as desirable, we then think we’re cheating, that it’s wrong to say that reality is positive. Why? Because if we can’t see a present leaf as presence or a sickness as presence, or anything as presence of a You Who is at the origin, then we are not able to say that reality is positive. This is why if we reduce reality to appearance, we cannot say that it’s positive, as a friend was just telling me about Marco Simoncelli, the motorcyclist who died during a race; in front of someone who was commenting on his death a nun who was present said: “Is it a tragedy that he died, or is it a good thing that someone can find his destiny?”. The way we react in front of a tragedy reveals our entire attitude. It’s not that one desires it – we don’t know what God’s design is –, but are we certain that he arrived to his destiny or that he had bad luck? If we cannot answer this question about Simoncelli, we can’t answer it even for ourselves and for those who are dear to us, or for our sick ones. Reality is positive because it exists. Since it exists, reality is a provocation, it’s a sign, and so it’s an opportunity for change, for re-awakening from slumber. As our teacher friend was saying earlier, sickness can be the opportunity for a re-awakening which brings unexpected, surprising fruit, as we have seen. But what does such a recognition of reality imply? Reason, a use of reason according to its true nature of knowledge of reality according to all its factors; a true and complete use, because reason is made to know reality as something given, something that draws us, as a provocation and as an invitation, as we said. But because of our fragility and the influence of our environment, for the power surrounding us, as we have heard in a letter, many times this use of reason is strange. This is what Christ came to give us. Since we are in this situation, Christ became flesh, not to spare us this work of reason, but to become our companion, to re-awaken all of reason’s ability to recognize reality for what it is. When Fr. Giussani says that Christ came, as we said on January 26th, to re-awaken the religious sense, he means that Christ came to make us men in such a way that we can look at reality according to its true nature, without being visionaries. So, if we do this, we can be in dialogue with anyone, otherwise we will only talk with our bellybutton in our bedroom, because we’ll be scared to talk with anyone else. And so, let’s keep in mind that we are still on the same journey we started on January 26th; now we can see why the religious sense lived in this way, of which reason is a clear sign and reality is also another sign, is the verification of faith, because if in front of these situations we cannot live reality in its true nature, it means that faith, our faith, as Fr. Giussani said, is lacking the religious sense, it’s a faith that is not able to re-awaken our humanity. But who cares about a faith that is not able to re-awaken our humanity, to save our humanity? It’s an obstacle more than a help. This is why we are interested in doing this verification also with this article, which is an instrument to play ourselves out in reality. We need to do the verification not only here, at the School of Community, but in reality, by risking with everyone about the crisis. This is why we would like to use this article for a public cultural battle, a CL battle as such, as a way for us to stay in reality, to offer a contribution to our colleagues, to our friends, to bring them the hope we have in us. A hope that we can’t reasonably bring in this context if not through a true use of reason. We cannot become credible just by being “pious”, but by becoming truly men with our use of reason, as the Pope did when he went to the German Parliament and challenged everyone with a different use of reason. Our contribution will be decisive only if the intelligence of faith becomes intelligence of reality. Otherwise, although they may not put us in prison, in society we’ll be insignificant for people. This commitment does not end in the short term, but will be with us for the next few months. This article was conceived to help us and anyone we meet to find adequate reasons to live this crisis as a challenge to change, to re-awaken the hope that for each one of us there is a possibility even in a situation of crisis. Only we, as Christians, can bring this, only we can do it, because you have already seen what happens to everyone

else. The judgment coming from this article is that the impetus of each one of us is something good for everyone, because the energy of the “I” is not exhausted in itself, but builds a people. And the history of Italy demonstrates this, as we have seen in the exhibit *150 Years of Subsidiarity*: in the history of Italy, in front of situations worse than ours, people got together and built Italy. We can see that it has been possible. It’s not that what we propose is not realistic. Italy’s 150 years experience is evidence that it was more realistic than any other theory. This is why the public moments directly promoted by the movement, can be associated to the exhibit about the *150 Years of Subsidiarity*.

As an example for everyone, and as a suggestion of something we invite you to propose anywhere, there will be a first meeting in Milan, on **Friday, November 4th at 9:30 p.m.** at the **Mediolanum Forum Assago**, to spread to the public the contents of this article. An example that each one of you, in your communities, can re-propose in whatever way you think would be fit.

Available on App Store is the application for iPhone, iPad and iPod touch for the green Song Book. Coming soon also the application for The Book of Hours.

We conclude our meeting by praying for tomorrow’s meeting with the Pope and with the representatives of other religions in Assisi.

Veni Sancte Spiritus