

**Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julian Carron**  
**Milan, 5/12/2010**

*Text of reference: "Can a man be born again, once he is old?", Exercises of the Fraternity of  
Communion and Liberation (Rimini 2010)*

*Song "Il nostro cuore"*

*Song "Lela"*

"I cannot live without you": this is the repercussion, the essence of life. I want to start by reading two letters. They are two reactions to the Exercises. "Dear Julian, I decided to write you these few lines because what happened in these days after returning from Rimini is a unique experience for my life. For the first time I discovered that I was truly moved by everything I was living; I use the word moved because I can't find any other word that can explain the amazement full of gratitude that I feel for being the object of this goodness; since by temperament and personality I am certainly not inclined to show my feelings and emotions, what is happening is definitely something generated by Another: "to be born again". This being moved in front of things - my daughters, my wife, my friends, colleagues at work, the entire reality - that got literally to the point of bringing tears to my eyes for the gratitude I felt experiencing all this goodness in Rimini. For the first time I participated in the Exercises [this is why I wanted to read this message] without starting from an analysis of myself based on what you were saying: "Here I am not doing well.... I haven't yet understood this..... but why?"; as the hours passed listening to you, I found myself more and more grateful for having being enveloped in this Good, glad and full of desire to dive into the sea of life". I was struck by this message because it is like a literal description of the beginning of chapter ten of *The Religious Sense*: it isn't the analysis that comes first, but the repercussion that reality provokes (in this case a Christian event; then - as Fr. Giussani says - one starts to identify the faces, the outline of things, and then he starts to recognize the "I". The Christian event consists in letting yourself be taken by this, and it may happen even if you come to the Exercises feeling skeptical and angry like the person who wrote this other message: "I started Friday and Saturday feeling very skeptical; I was reading that sentence ("How can a grown man be born again?"), and I was saying: "No, it's not possible, what am I doing here?" I couldn't even stand my friends. Then you started to talk about that kid, the one who was opposing you in class, he was skeptical too; maybe this is why at that point my attention was riveted, I stopped to take notes that I was taking reluctantly up to that point, and while you were speaking I was more and more riveted, it seemed to last an eternity, every word sounding like a strange invitation, beautiful. Little by little I was waking up: "Then, according to you, the most adequate position, the subconscious point of departure in front of reality, is being suspicious?". Sure it is being suspicious, it is so evident....does he think I am dumb?! 'Then, according to what you are telling me, this morning when your mother put the cup of coffee in front of you at breakfast, you said: I am not going to drink this until I have performed a chemical analysis to make sure that she didn't poison it'. I still remember the reaction of that kid who, with an angry face, threw his hands in the air and said: "But I have lived with my mother for sixteen years!" Suddenly I started to cry: sympathy for my anger, for my skepticism, somebody has sympathy for me just the way I am. I went back to the hotel and I didn't hate anyone any longer, I swear that I was in shock, I couldn't believe it: "How can a grown man be born again?". "Yes, he can". I understood one thing: I always thought that the problem wasn't the lack of humanity, and I was always saying: "For heavens sake, I have plenty of desire!" But in man there is much more: freedom. I had never thought about it: it's not enough to desire the infinite, you also have to want it; you have to want to be born again. It is strange that one may not want his own good; it is strange, absurd, and yet so very true; I am my own witness on this: there, on that chair I touched to the core all the dynamics of

freedom; I don't know why this time it happened like that, but it is so much better, without being spared the sorrow. To be loved when in sorrow is better than just suffering.

I am re-reading this at the beginning of SofC because, no matter how one arrives here tonight or to the next SofC meetings, the question is if one leaves some cracks open to let himself be struck. The problem isn't that we have to be clever or not angry or not tired; we arrive here like everybody else, poor wretches, and this isn't the problem. The only true problem is if –when something like this happens – I let myself to be struck. Nothing else is necessary but letting yourself to be struck, this simplicity we spoke about (because, now that we had the lessons we have all the factors in front of us, and we can understand which element of life is at play as we face reality). Tonight I started like this because each of us has to desire this, as our friend said: each of us has to want to be reborn.

*I would like to understand the meaning of being educated to be attentive and accepting in the circumstance one is living.*

Are we talking already about the second lesson, or are we still on the introduction?

*I understand, but my question stems from a remark you made in the introduction. During the first evening of the Exercises, when you said that the Risen Christ is our hope, I realized that for me it wasn't true. I am going to tell you a fact that made me realize this clearly. Exactly the evening before leaving for the Exercises I was at a party to celebrate the PhD of a colleague of mine (I work at the university and I got a doctorate); she was surrounded by many friends who were congratulating her, she was happy, serene, because now she has a paid research fellowship that allows her to continue her research program at the university, she has a boyfriend.....At one point in the midst of the party I got lost in thought and I started to think that I was jealous of her, because in this moment she has all that I desire but I am still denied (I don't have the possibility to continue the research I am interested in, my vocation is all but clear, at times it seems that my friendships are failing me). I felt a sense of dismay and I told myself: "Well, I could say that I have Jesus" (she claims to be an atheist), but as I was thinking and saying that ("I have Jesus"), I realized that it wasn't true, that it was false, that in that moment for me Jesus was not winning, He doesn't win. It is as if I am at the starting point you mentioned during the first evening of the Exercises; I need to do that work you were talking about. However, I want to understand what it actually means for me in this circumstance that I am living. You were insisting on the fact that our humanity is missing, but it seems to me that I do engage my humanity. You were talking of being educated to be attentive and accepting: what am I not accepting? Because I think that I am addressing some desires that are fundamental: my job prospect, my vocation, my friends. I need help, because I realize that otherwise life is about being angry, and this can be seen also on the outside, and I am sorry because Jesus came to change life.*

He changes life as we have seen. I thank you, because your witness really makes us all aware of the beginning of the Exercises, that is, of the work that we need to do (I received many other witnesses like this, which I am not reading since the problem is now clear). Why? Because this is an example of what we were saying: "Christ is risen! [...] This is the event that dominates history, an event that no mistake of ours or of our brothers can eliminate, and that all the evil that may happen cannot erase.[...] There is no greater newness [not even the party for your friend's doctorate], and there has never been a greater newness than the fact that Christ is risen. [...] We gather together to live these days under the pressure of this being moved [...]. It happened: what light, what breath, what hope this fact brings to our life! [...] It is His victorious presence among us that pushes us to continue our journey trying to overcome ever more the separation between knowing and believing, so that this fact recognized by faith may determine life more than anything else. Instead, if this fact were to remain only at the level of piety and

devotion, it would be as if it never happened, as if it didn't have all the density of reality that is able to change life, to affect life; then, we would remain determined by everything else [by all that we see that is not working], that overwhelms us, that confuses us, that makes us feel discouraged, that prevents us from breathing, from seeing, from touching first hand the novelty that Christ Risen introduced". This is the evidence of the journey we have to make, because we are in front of an alternative: either Christ is not risen, and then it is better to say it now so we can go to bed, or He is really risen. But this doesn't seem to touch our life as a real fact. This is the question: the disconnection between what I affirm as fact and what I perceive. The entire Exercises have been the attempt to offer the path we have to help each other to follow in the next months to win this disconnection. Because, you see, only if you are determined by the Resurrection you become free of all jealousy: when you live an experience of fullness you can live without the rest. If we don't make this journey that Fr. Giussani suggests to us, the emptiness and the gap remain; not because Christ is not risen – this doesn't depend on you or me: it happened, period! - , but because it doesn't determine our life yet, it is as if it didn't have yet the density of reality that everything else you touch has. If you had the same existential awareness about the Risen Christ as either Peter or Mary Magdalene had, at the party you would have thought: "It's a pity that she is celebrating only this party, because there is one that is much more beautiful". Because, without the Risen Christ how long will this joy you now envy her for last? How long? Haven't you gone to many parties and celebrations in your life? And how many times did you catch yourself saying: 'How long will this last?'. We don't want a bad end, not just for this or that party, but for the feast that is our entire life! If we are willing to make this journey, we will see what happens. I will wait for you to tell me in a few weeks.

*On May 16<sup>th</sup> my son will be confirmed; as soon as we heard about the trip to Rome for the Regina Coeli we asked - to no avail - every church in my town to see if we could change the date; so we considered the issue closed. Then, on Sunday evening, back from the Exercises, I was having coffee with my wife and we said: "But what is important for us? We definitely want to answer to what the Mystery is asking us, but are we sure that we tried every possible option?" After making sure that it wouldn't have been a problem for our son, we checked with more distant churches, and in the end, after some twists and turns, we were able to move the Confirmation's date. In the same way we were able to find a way to get to Rome, and so five people in our family will go with five different means of transportation, and in the end even money is not going to be a problem. Today I kept asking myself: "Why did I do this?" I answered myself with that simple sentence I heard you say a year ago: "If something interests you, you run". It seems to me that my heart takes me there like when you are in love and you speed all the way to get there and see her, it knows no bounds. One runs if there is a live man who is waiting for you: I want to go to Rome to hug my father; and the greatest discovery I can make today is that I start to intuit that I can enjoy my life within the works of Another, so that my life is becoming more simple, since it would be enough to follow how He is happening (then I always complicate things because I want to add my own piece).*

Exactly.

*I understand that in this moment the most important gesture the Movement is proposing to us is participating in the Regina Coeli in Rome on Sunday; and I understand that my risk is that of adhering to a proposal blindly: "You need to do this". Thinking back to what happened with the encounter of the Pope with the movements a few years ago, I don't want to miss an opportunity for myself this Sunday in Rome. I wanted to ask your help on this: how not to miss anything.*

In connection with this I am going to read you an email I received. “After your invitation to participate in the pilgrimage to Rome I decided to go wholeheartedly, changing all my plans, because the proposal was for me; I couldn’t delegate, because giving this up would have been like not loving myself. Now I realize that what is at stake goes far beyond the fact of trusting you (that is, trusting someone you love and who is like a father to you), but that also this pilgrimage is first of all a way to verify how faith is relevant to life’s needs, as you always repeat to us. I leave for Rome with this question: “Who are You, oh Christ, Who makes me move like this, Who makes a whole people move like this?”; without this it seems to me that at times to simply follow is not truly obeying”.

About this, let me tell you something that happened to me last week and that summarizes many conversations I recently had. One day, right before I was scheduled to teach my class at the Catholic University, Father Pino had a meeting with all the students belonging to the community who had not yet enrolled to go to Rome; he repeated the reasons to go and challenged them in a moving way. I heard about it because, during the breaks in between classes, many students, in response to what Father Pino had said, approached me to discuss whether or not to go. At that point I was forced to give some reasons to do it, and I recalled an example that I want to tell you now, because after the Exercises identifying the dynamic of our actions has become easier. A girl told me: “For the past year I taught catechism and prepared some children for their First Communion, which will take place right on the 16<sup>th</sup>, so I feel it’s normal for me to stay put.” You see? As our freedom approaches reality there is immediately a reduction, and then we make decisions about a reality that has been already reduced. I didn’t need to give her a long explanation about the Rome initiative; she had already heard all the reasons for going, so I told her: “If your father had an accident on that very day, would you attend the First Communion?” She was disarmed by my question, because she understood that confronted with a motivation of that caliber her whole perspective would change. I further questioned her: “You see? Your problem is that the reason that the Movement is giving you to go to Rome is not powerful enough, is not sufficient to make it reasonable for you not to attend the First Communion, and to tell those children that you have something to do that is more important, and that doing it coincides with their own good. In front of these things, I don’t want now to make a decision in your place. I tell you to consider carefully whether or not the reason that the Movement is supplying is truly enough to make you go.” That girl’s freedom had not been able to start moving correctly because she had not yet understood the importance of the gesture that was proposed, and therefore she was putting it at the same level of a catechism commitment. You see? Freedom comes into play in the discovery of reality; if I, in this discovery, reduce reality, what happens? It happens that my freedom makes decisions regarding a reality that has already been reduced, and struggles between alternatives that would be inherently not worth comparing. Then we don’t know what decision to make. The whole problem lies in understanding the import of reality. There are people among us who made a reservation to go see the Holy Shroud; some of them will give it up, but others will go to the Holy Shroud while we will be in Rome. Allow me to ask you: would we be interested at all in the Holy Shroud, as well as in so many other aspect of Christian life, if not for our encounter with the Movement? Is the contradiction clear? One who does this, will not be able to escape the most complete confusion, because even if one affirms aspects that are per se beautiful and true, that will not be enough to keep one’s person united to faith’s core. For this reason we have to help each other to understand why we go to Rome: we don’t go to support the Pope, who does not need our support – the Holy Spirit is thoroughly up to the task; Jesus told Peter: “I will be with you so that you will be able to support your brothers” – but because we need the Pope! We want to be supported by him, and we want to ask God for of bond with the historic point of reference that the Pope represents, to always win - a point of reference that prevents us from getting lost and from falling prey to the most complete confusion. As Protestantism shows, when this historical point of reference, which is per se absolutely fragile, is disposed of, everything is blown to smithereens. We are going to Rome to ask the Lord and the Virgin to grant us to keep this bond strong.

To those, within and outside the Church, who think that the attacks on the Pope will be able to sever that bond, we want to tell with our reason and our freedom, with our belonging and our prayer, and with our cry to Christ, that that bond is sacred to us! We go to Rome because what is at stake is faith itself. Our going isn't a pious gesture, one like many others; it isn't a daytrip. It is that when somebody tries to sever our bond with Peter, we say no. Is it clear? Is it reasonable enough? Each one of us has to make a decision about it; as you can see, in front of a proposal of this importance, we are all asked to employ our reason and freedom. We don't simply get on a moving sidewalk; we give ourselves the reasons to go to the Pope truly with all our awareness and desire: may the Lord unite us with this point of reference, which represents – as we said last time – the historical anchor of our faith!

*I attended the Fraternity Exercises for the first time, and the overabundance of that experience made me want to be here tonight. After the Exercises, the question that I had reading the school of community on the assembly on charity was still there nonetheless. In one of the most difficult periods of my life, when I was facing very important choices, a girl that I was helping through the Food Bank asked me to go visit her, even when I didn't have to deliver a package. Her request struck me, yet I was going through such an apocalypse that I just answered with a vague: "Yes, I'll see you soon." Then, struggling with and distracted by my circumstances, and with my usual lack of faith in the grace of the Lord, I let a lot of time go by - too much time. When I finally decided to go see her she was about to terminate a pregnancy – her third, all from different men - and she had already met with the anesthesiologist. She had called me and I hadn't answered; Christ had called me and I had resisted: I had not answered Him. At first I was overcome with acute pain and great desperation, then I started praying, begging for forgiveness: "Please help me Jesus, I have seen You; I really see You now." I tracked down all those friends I thought would be able to lend a hand with proposals, solutions, collaborations, and the promise to accompany each other. I'll skip ahead. A few days ago I attended with some friends of mine the Baptism of that child, whom she decided to call Peter. "I'll call him Peter, like the head of the Church." We were there with her and all her relatives (ex inmates, drug addicts, and what else); we had fireworks, a party with karaoke... What a miracle, my friends. The Lord is always in action everywhere, and He doesn't stop at anything to conquer our heart. Yesterday morning, as I was slicing some peppers before going to work, I said to myself: "It's strange how we are able to put up with the rain and cold of the last few days; in winter we dress warmly, almost out of resignation to the idea of a grey sky. Lately though, after shedding cloths and after the shock of the first days of intense heat and sun that made us think about the hypothesis of summer, we are up for anything. With courage we settle for some feeble sunshine and we keep opening up the windows of our homes." The thought made me smile, not because I am crazy about summer, but because I immediately drew a comparison between that thought and what I am currently living: I feel almost naked because I am broke, and my children are problematic, yet I don't care about it. Those have become unimportant details because I know – I am certain about it, there is no discussion – that any moment now summer will explode, bringing everything I have desired, and there will be nothing I shall want. Despite the uneasiness caused by my nakedness, tomorrow, in a minute, now that I am living it, the light and warmth of summer will give me everything I need. All this, dear Carrón, seems fantastic to me...*

Does it seem fantastic, or is it fantastic?

*It is fantastic. It is the hundredfold; it isn't a mystical delirium, because this has been going on for the past three years.*

I think there is not much mystical delirium about you.

*In the assembly on charity I read "A return [...] reveals the reasonableness and the justice of charity; because of your charity you will receive a hundredfold, but that's not why you act. If you count on having the hundredfold, you will lose what little you have." That scared me, because I experience the hundredfold every day, and I think it would be inhuman not to desire it...*

You can't avoid desiring it. The point is that when you are under the pressure of being moved, you relate to reality with gratuitousness and you don't look for something in return.

*I have a question: what is the relationship between the fact that life is a journey (you touched on this point at the Exercises, yet I want to understand it better) and the fact that the verification process happens in the moment you enter into relationship with reality? I realize that there are numerous occasions when I can say that the You dominates, and there are many other occasions where the You doesn't dominate, or better yet, I don't even let Him enter my horizon. I realize that the reduction of the new creature to an ethically irreprehensible being not only becomes something that sets me up for a moral defeat, but it also becomes an excuse to avoid doing the work; it is as if, deep down, (I will not come up with an explicit theory, because I know it would be ridiculous) the underlying thought were: I didn't make it, once again. This remark refers to when you said that the accusation of hypocrisy is the most adequate one, because it isn't a matter of intelligence, but of morality, that is, of availability. Often it is as if I judged the events that happen to me – that are signs of His presence – with a reason and a freedom that have already severed the relationship with Christ, or that are outside of the relationship with Christ, and I realize that this is a scam, because I conceive of the relationship with Christ as if I had not met Him, even if I have already met Him. Studying school of community I recalled an answer that Father Giussani gave: “No one among us is able to be himself [...] unless he stretches out his hand and begs the Lord, Who made him, to bring him to completion.” At the Exercises I perceived this as a very dramatic issue from an existential point of view: my difficulty is not that I haven't had the encounter, it is that in the instant I conceive of myself outside of the relationship with Christ.*

What does this mean? What is the difference between a child who makes a mistake and an adult who makes a mistake? That the child does not sever that bond; he can't even look at his mistake without seeing it immediately embraced by his mother. On the contrary, what happens to us? We think that we have to deal with it on our own after all. What is evident to a child, i.e. that he cannot make it on his own, is not part of our habitual perception of ourselves. For us this fragility of ours is like a phase we have to overcome. Furthermore, we think that the Mystery gets angry at us, just like we get angry at ourselves, thus projecting on Him our own measure. This way we sever the bond. What happens when one hurts you? A distance is introduced between you and that person; it happens even with the person you love most. This is the true evil of evil: that it strikes at the level of the bond that introduces us to real knowledge. So the real issue isn't not to make mistakes – if that were the case it would be all over for us –but for our bond to become more powerful, and determine life more than our partial gaze. We see this in Jesus: the evil that Jesus suffers doesn't separate Him from the Father. Exactly like what will happen with those who would like to separate us from the Pope; they will fail, not on account of our being good, but in as much as we will ask His presence to prevail on any possible mistake.

*I, too, want to tell you about Rome. I am a married man and a father of four. On Sunday my third son will have his Confirmation. Because of this, my wife and I immediately decided that we would not go to Rome. Everything changed when, last Sunday, our second daughter told us that she wanted to go. Knowing how close my children are to each other, I was quite surprised by her decision. My wife and I decided that if our daughter's freedom was making her say that she wanted to go, it was important to let her go (anyway, I said to myself, the oldest daughter was going to stay with us and help us live this experience of my son's Confirmation.) Monday night, while we were having dinner, our oldest daughter told us that she too wanted to go to Rome with her friends, mentioning the same reasons that you just gave us. At that point, my wife and I had to surrender to this imposing Presence, and we understood that the magnitude of going to Rome was greater than any project of ours, and that my daughters' “yes”, coincided with my son's “yes” to the Holy Spirit during Confirmation.*

Thank you. See you in Rome. To work on the Exercises, to start reviewing everything we said, we need to start from our asking or from the wound that we carry inside, as we saw; because if we do not

cancel our asking, we will become much more aware of the content of the booklet. In fact, when we have a desire or an urgent issue in our life, we are eager to work; when we listen to our friends, when we hear of an event, or if we have a concern and are open, everything speaks to us more. In order to understand, we need to put into play what is human in us. If we do, everything becomes part of the adventure of knowledge and therefore of the meaning; so we are not in a hurry to come up with rushed answers, we leave the questions open and let life itself, our readings and experience provide the answers, so that the worth of faith in regard to life's needs can come to the surface. The booklet of the Fraternity Exercises is enclosed with the May issue of *Traces* that is now available. *Traces* is an example of the gaze on reality that is born of the experience of the Movement. Becoming one with it, reading it – not only to get the news, but also to know how they are conveyed, to learn that gaze – becoming one with the way this gaze operates, helps us to learn this gaze, that is, to learn a different way to judge even the news that reach us and strike us in the papers, on TV, etc...and not to be defenseless and unable to react adequately when confronted with those news. In one of the e-mails that I received, a person wrote how the work we were doing in school of community made her less defenseless in front of reality, and since we can't examine every issue here, starting to make that gaze our own in the way we see everyday things, is part of the education we need to overcome the dualism, the separation between knowing and believing. What I have at heart is that you don't get caught off guard and that you are able to judge; if you do, you are able to figure out what is true, what is real, what is reliable and what isn't, about a piece of news that you hear. *Traces* is a fundamental tool to learn that gaze, and the editorial helps us to understand the reasons for going to Rome on May 16<sup>th</sup>, for the *Regina Coeli* with the Pope.

I'll see you all in Rome; now let's pray together (those who are here and those who are connected.)

- *Glory be*