

**Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julian Carron**  
**Milan, 3/24/10**

Text of reference: L.Giussani, "Is it possible to live this way?", vol. 3, Charity", p. 25-29.

Song    *"My song is love unknown"*  
Song    *"Balada de caridade"*

"Morality is to imitate God in charity". Now we have to pay attention, because I noticed that already when we worked on the previous passage ("Perfect, like your heavenly Father"), a way of perceiving perfection of a different nature from what we discussed started to be introduced. We always run the risk of using the words, at a certain point, starting not from what SofC says, but from what we think. If this happens with the word 'perfection', imagine what can happen with words like 'morality' and 'to imitate': we are already lost, off track. This is why I insist that we start to look together at what the words 'to imitate' or 'morality' mean for us; usually we think of something that we should try to do, like to imitate another, in the end always something outside us: to copy the model of another, to look at another, to try to do things like another. Now, with this image in mind, let's read Fr. Giussani, who says: "Charity in its original value, which is identified with the blood of God, with the life of God", and to make us understand what it means, he quotes a phrase from a hymn: "The source of being is in You", the source of being, of my being is in You. Try to imagine the little fetus conceived by the mother: everything comes from the body of the mother, "in fact, he is part of his mother's body as his mother's nose is part of his mother's body, as his mother's lung is part of his mother's body" trying to get down even to the details describing every fiber as part of his mother. "If the small fetus could be aware, he would feel everything flowing from the organism of his mother: blood, nerves.....Think of the kind of total dependence". Let's try to identify ourselves with it: what perception of total dependence should come from this self-awareness, from this awareness of self! And he continues: "Man comes from God [...] infinitely more than a baby is born from the viscera of his mother [look how far we are from this self-awareness]. While he is barely a speck in the viscera of his mother, his mother is everything, everything in the literal sense of the word. If the baby were conscious of himself, he would say: 'You are everything for me'". "Now, if charity is [...] the dynamism of that movement without end and without boundaries that is God [if God's nature from which I originate totally, is charity] [...], everything that might be born from this sea of giving and being moved [...] would have the same vibration, would have the same movement, would have the same dynamic, would have the same law. It would be charity". How can we understand that God is this 'sea of being moved'? Let's look at ourselves when we are moved, when being moved dominates every fiber of our being, and think that God is this, magnified to the greatest degree. For us this is simply a reflection of that 'sea of being moved' which is God, so much so that when we see it in another, when we see another moved in this way, we say: "What happened to you?" We see that the person in front of us is participating in that 'sea of being moved' that is God which is originating him now, and we desire to be moved like that, to participate in this being moved, as one was saying to me: "I want to have this gaze, I want to be moved like this". The fact that God is charity, that he is this 'sea of being moved', that He is the origin of my being, means that God wants to share with us this way of being moved. And everything born of Him has the same vibration. Now we can go back to the word 'to imitate' and we can say: "To imitate God is this", it isn't something outside me, no, God is more me than I am myself. I can

'imitate' only if I participate in this vibration. This is why if we separate this second part from the previous one, the problems begin, as you witness to me in your letters. I am quoting an e-mail I received: << "We must also love one another: morality is to imitate God in this; to follow Jesus or imitate the Father". Please explain to me how I can love my parents! For me it is impossible when I hear from my mother that I am disgusting, and she repeats it to me countless times; and when my father never comes to my defense, but only takes my mother's side; when a mother never listens to her daughter, and the father only pretends to listen to her, but then he does what he wants (I could give you thousands of examples like these) >>. Well, it may seem impossible to make it, but not even a person like this can avoid participating in the being moved of Being - which makes him free in spite of his mother telling him he is disgusting -, because the vibration of Being is stronger than what his mother says. This is what Jesus introduced into life, to free us from any gaze that tries to reduce us to the disgust another feels for us. This is why it is worth it for us.

*In facing this chapter - beginning with that sentence of St. John: "If God so loved us, we must also love one another"- if I am sincere as I was for a few moments in front of that text, for me the first repercussion is: "I am made to be invested by this 'sea of being moved' and to look at reality and gaze at others like that". Then, the little question pops up: "But, is it possible?!" Well, I am answering yes not because of reasoning, because I understood it, but because I saw it, I saw it and I see it. I will recall two short episodes, because lately I saw it in a place where you wouldn't think it's possible: in a maximum security prison. Two Saturdays ago I spent the day with some friends visiting one of these prisons. This is the first fact: in all prisons inmates don't eat lunch together, there is no cafeteria, people eat in their cell with their cellmate, two people per cell: this not only for a security reason, but because the inmates would never want to eat together, they are the first refusing to do it, because inside a prison there are 'rules', according to the sentence one has received; friendship doesn't exist, normally inmates don't even talk to each other. I ate with my friends and sixty inmates, and they told me that for the last few months this has become the normal routine, since the inmates have started to work inside the prison thanks to the Giotto Co-op that gives them work. Looking at them, I thought: "These men met that moved gaze we read about in the text of SofC through other inmates who had converted, through the friends who visit the prison to give them work", and I saw that they were starting to look at each other defined by that gaze they were receiving, by that moved gaze that only Christ generates when he embraces you. And they have started to look at each other saying: "Hi, what's your name? Let's have lunch together" It's already clear like this, but for someone who is visiting the prison it is something impressive and out of the world! The second fact is that recently some of these inmates converted, they asked for the Sacraments, two in particular asked to be baptized. I am going to read to you the letter that one of them, a Chinese, wrote to his inmate friends, because this letter moved me. "Dearest friends, I see that this path that is preparing me for Baptism is the greatest choice I have ever made in my life. From that moment my life has found a meaning, and I think that in following this road it will become ever more certain. Since I started to follow it I realized how even my personality is changing. For example, in the past I was very nervous, I would loose my temper immediately when something went wrong or was annoying me; instead now I am very calm and serene in front of what happens, because Jesus corrects me in my mind and shows to me how I should live and where I need to go. I am reading Mark's Gospel, who wrote the history of Jesus, and I like it a lot: I was struck by what Jesus does and by how he treats people and things. So, I find myself 'copying' what Jesus*

*did to overcome difficulties and deal with circumstances. I cannot perform miracles, because only He can do that, but I see that He is performing miracles for me and for you. I thank God for giving me a second life, because for what I did I should have been sent back to China, and there I would have risked the death penalty. But Jesus saved me, letting me stay here. As my Christian name I chose Andrew, because he was one of the first two who met Jesus and followed Him. I want to say hi to everybody, and I assure you that I am praying for you that you may overcome all the difficulties, and get out of prison as soon as possible. I am sure the Lord is listening to me, because I am the only Chinese who is praying».*

This is the answer to whoever asks me if it is possible. Everybody can identify with this Chinese inmate: after all he has done, nothing has prevented him from being invested by something like this that makes him read the Gospel as not even we often read it. Who among you, reading the Gospel, has been amazed by how Jesus treats people and things? Why is he amazed? Because, due to the experience he is having, he can recognize what he is experiencing, and then he realizes that there, in the Gospel, there is that new way of treating everybody: he can recognize it for the change that happened in him.

*To recount the experience I had, I would like to read very quickly a passage from what you said in the synthesis at the Assembly of Italian Responsibles in Riva del Garda, published as Page One on the March issue of Traces: « “The important thing is not to change the method”. What does it mean not to change the method? “To follow what happens”, to follow the grace that happens, which is for you and for me. The main point of the path of these years is this: if we left ourselves be swept away by what was happening». I am recounting an episode that describes this clearly. I went to visit, at his home, a gentleman who had lost his job; a friend who has this man’s son in her class asked me to go and see him with her, to help him find a job. A very disadvantaged family, he has three sons, lost his wife when the children were little, he wasn’t able to keep one of the children and sent him to an orphanage, now the kids are grown, the youngest at fourteen came back to live with the father; now he is sixteen, the situation is dramatic, this man has been home without a job for the past two years. You get in this poor home and he starts to tell you the ordeals he is going through; you are already there trying to help him and then you are moved by him and you understand that you cannot help him even if you find him a job, that his heart is more than that, it is begging for more, so much so that you change the focus; so I told him: “My friend, we have to start working here, beyond the fact that it is paid or not, let’s start working to get up in the morning: it’s possible to live!” Here the miracle of His Presence happened: Angelo’s face was transfigured; it is as if when we got in he was blond, and when we left he had dark, curly hair, unbelievable, another person, another! He becomes all radiant and says: “I understand”, he says it more than ten times: “I understand, I understand”. I asked him: “What do you understand?”. “I understand that you are strong”. “Me, strong? Strong is the One who manifested Himself here and now”, so I told him: “In two weeks I will come back, I want to come and see you again”. Why? Because I need to be surprised again by that being moved, to be again in front of what became manifest here. The friend who had brought me there to introduce me asked: “May I come back too?” I am ending with something you told us last time: “The first thing that happened to the disciples wasn’t that they were charitable towards people; the first thing that happened to them was that they were fascinated by Christ; the first object of their love, of their charity was Christ, everything else was born from there”. This is what is happening to me.*

Thank you, because this reminder about method, that you can find on Page One, is the way that He communicates being to us today. How does He communicate being to us? How did that unemployed gentleman change to the point of becoming radiant? Through the event, an event that happens before our eyes: it's not only the event of my generation (of when I was born); it's not only the event of being generated now; rather, it is this "more," because the Christian event introduces this "more being," this "more vibration." And how does it do so? By making it happen. So the real question is whether we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by what happens. We can imitate God if we let ourselves be generated by the event that He is making happen in us, which starts out from a particular fact and reaches all of us: "What does it mean for us, we who are born of God ... what does it mean that we must also love one another? If charity is described as a gift of self [note this expression] under the pressure of being moved, a gift of self charged with movement, it must be that way for us." *Is It Possible To Live This Way?* Vol. 3, pp. 26-27

What does "gift of self under the pressure of being moved" mean? Try to think of when you find yourselves really moved and you start to relate to others: what happens? We throw ourselves into reality in a different way, to the point that they ask us, "What happened to you?" And why do they ask us this? Because this relationship is so gratuitous, so free, so different from the normal way that we relate to one another that it communicates the same vibration of being – under the pressure of this being moved. Imagine when something has really happened to us and then we relate to everything, or imagine what all of you have experienced, when someone is in love, totally impacted by this event, moved, and he relates to everything, even daily things, in an entirely different, entirely new way. Charity is this gift of self, this relationship with others, this relationship with reality, under the pressure of this being moved. And then you understand what we have been saying for a while; you understand the relationship that lies between what is human, between not passing over our humanity and being moved. Not excluding our humanity is the prerequisite for being moved, because rocks are not moved. The problem is that I am not a rock and I can really be overwhelmed by this being moved; and so you understand that letting your own humanity be struck by this gift, letting yourself be moved by Christ's love, by this gaze, by His gift of self, is what allows you to imitate God, to love others in this new way under the pressure of this being moved: it's something else! Yes, this is imitating God – this is all described in the School of Community. I haven't added anything. And so the law of the I is this loving, because "the dynamism proper to the I, which is therefore directly derived from the dynamism of God, is loving, that is, giving oneself to the other, being moved." Not out of moralism; it would be impossible to give oneself in this way. No one on his own can generate this giving of oneself, so full of being moved, to someone else. It is only if we let ourselves be overwhelmed by what is happening, by that event through which the Mystery now, Christ present now, communicates this vibration to the root of our being, that I am then not determined by someone who looks at me with disgust, but am more determined by that vibration which sets me free. Without the experience of Christ we would be determined just as everyone else is ("He doesn't look at me"; "He treats me poorly"); this is the different origin that does not depend on recompense, that does not depend on what someone else might say to me nor on the attitude he has toward me, that can make it possible to love as God loves, who makes the sun rise on the good and the bad every day. But this is not a connection that we can make. This is not the real decision – deciding to imitate God. The real decision is letting ourselves be overwhelmed by what is happening, letting ourselves be generated by this same ineffable and total vibration.

To finish, I will read to you the editorial from the April *Traces*, which regards the Pope's letter, because this letter, which the Pope wrote in the face of a fact as awful as the abuse of children, is

a witness of the “being moved” that the School of Community talks about, which allows us to look at everything, to not make concessions, to the point of making a judgment, precisely for this reason. Since all the newspapers are full of a different outlook, we cannot do the School of Community without talking about and without looking at this fact differently, helped by this witness of the Pope, because what needs to be asked is, “Where does this gaze come from?”

*Editorial from Traces, April 2010*

*There would be much to discuss about the events that led Benedict XVI to write his Letter to the Catholics of Ireland, and we could do this by starting from the facts, the numbers, and the data which, if looked at attentively, reveal a reality much less enormous than appears from the ferocious media campaign. Or we could start from the contradictions of those who, in the same newspaper, denounce certain wicked deeds, but after a few pages justify everything and everybody, especially in matters of sex. We could do this, and perhaps it would help to understand the context of a Church really under attack, whatever its errors may be. Except the Pope’s humble and courageous gesture pointed attention further, toward the heart of the matter.*

*Clearly there is a wound, a very serious one, one of the kind that provoked Christ (and his vicars, too) to use fiery words (“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”)*

*There is filth in the Church. Joseph Ratzinger himself said so during the Way of the Cross at the Coliseum five years ago, shortly before being elected Pope and, being realistic, he has never stopped recalling the fact since. Sin is there, grave sin. Evil is there, along with the abyss of pain that evil carries with it, and everything possible has to be done, and with firmness, to stem the evil and to make amends for the pain. The Pope is already doing this, and his letter reiterates it strongly when it asks the guilty to “answer for it before Almighty God and before properly constituted tribunals.”*

*This is precisely why the true heart of the matter, the forgotten focus, lies elsewhere. Alongside all the limitations and within the Church’s wounded humanity, is there or is there not something bigger than sin, something radically bigger than sin? Is there something that can shatter the unrelenting weight of our evil? Something that, as the Pope writes, “has the power to forgive even the most serious sins, and to bring forth good even from the most fearsome evil?”*

*“This is the point: God was moved by our nothingness,” Father Giussani said in the phrase quoted on the CL Easter Poster. “Not only that. God was moved by our betrayal, by our crude, forgetful, and treacherous poverty, by our pettiness. It’s compassion, pity, passion. He had pity on me.”*

*This is what the Church brings to the world, and certainly not because of its members’ merit, goodness, or even less because of their coherence: God’s compassion for our pettiness, something greater than our limitations, the only thing infinitely greater than our limitations. If we don’t start from here, we cannot understand at all; everything goes mad, literally.*

*We, too, have had and do have moments when we dodge that compassion, and run away from it. At times, it is in the Church itself that faith is reduced to ethics and morality is reduced to an impossible lonely recourse to laws, as if the need of that embrace were something to be ashamed of. But if we forget Christ, if we do away with the wholly different measure that He introduces into the world now, through the Church, then we no longer have the terms with which to understand and judge the Church.*

*Then it becomes easy to mistake attention for the victims and regard for their history for a conniving silence, and prudence toward the guilty parties, true or presumed – perhaps accused on the basis of rumors emerging after decades – for the will to “cover up” (sadly it has sometimes been the case). Then it is almost inevitable to keep arguing about celibacy without even touching on the real value of virginity. And it becomes impossible to understand why the Church can be hard and motherly at the same time with the priests who go wrong. It can punish them severely and ask them to serve their sentence and make amends for the evil (it has already done so in the past, and will always do so), but without snapping, if possible, that thread that binds them, because it is the only thing that can redeem them. It can ask its children to “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, not so as to demand of them an impossible irreprehensibility, but so as to remind them of a tension to live the same mercy with which God embraces us (“be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful”).*

*This is why the Church can educate, which, in the end, is the real question being challenged by those who are accusing it (“See, even the priests do wrong, and badly wrong. How can we trust them with our children?”) as if the Church’s being teacher all depended on the behavior of her children, and not on Christ, on that presence which, amid all the errors and horrors committed, makes an embrace like that of Chagall’s Prodigal Son, which appears on the Easter Poster, possible in the world. There, alongside Father Giussani’s phrase, is another by Benedict XVI: “Conversion to Christ ultimately means this: to exit the illusion of self-sufficiency in order to discover and accept one’s own need – the need for His forgiveness and His friendship.”*

*This is the embrace of Christ, in our wounded and needy humanity, far greater than the evil we can commit. If the Church, with all its limitations, did not have this to offer to the world, even to the victims of those barbarities, then we would be lost. Because the evil would still be there, but it would be impossible to overcome it.*

You have it on the website to read it at home and to spread it around at this time when a mentality is expanding that leaves everyone lost, because you cannot confuse the recognition of evil, that evil is truly evil, with the fact that we cannot overcome it except by opening ourselves to something Other: this vibration, this charity that the Mystery witnesses to us.

I thank all of you, here present or linked by video, who so attentively took part in the meeting on education with Cardinal Bagnasco (an initiative put on together with the Diocese of Milan, with the presence of the auxiliary bishop who represented Cardinal Tettamanzi), for having shown how we really care about education, just as Father Giussani taught us.

•*Veni Sancte Spiritus*