

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, March 26, 2014

Reference text: “The Mystery of the Incarnation” in At the Origin of the Christian Claim, McGill-Queen’s University Press, pp. 99-108.

Song *Il monologo di Giuda*

Song *Quando uno ha il cuore buono*

Glory Be

We had given ourselves, as the text to work on, Chapter 9 of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, the last chapter in the book. We will then resume our work with the Fraternity Exercises, which will take place soon. The last time that we met, we ended by proposing, and then publishing in *Traces*, the Page One [Witnessing and Recounting], which was an attempt to help us understand what is happening in society and to offer the beginning of a judgment. So, let’s begin.

I was very struck by Chapter 8, and especially by the Page One, because it shed light, in a new way, on an aspect of my job that I had never considered before, and which is instead the most striking cultural characteristic of this generation of kids that I face every morning. Because – before all of the moral analyses made about today’s youth – the problem of the kids that I face in school is that they hate Leopardi. If I had to define the characteristic of this generation, I would say that it is this hatred of Leopardi, so much so that for several years now – and it is striking how reality provides signs that one doesn’t read – when I start with juniors, on the first day of school there is always a kid who raises his hand and says, “We aren’t going to study Leopardi, are we? We don’t want to study Leopardi.” This year, in part because of a particular story that I had with this class, but especially because of the things that you told us, the way in which you made us discover Chapter 8 as a judgment on the reality that we are living, I had this hostility right in front of me, and I decided to face it. Last week I was struck, because I challenged my class. I had to start teaching Leopardi, the kids didn’t want me to, there was a rebellion, and I said, “Listen, let me do this; I will read you a poem and then I will ask you a question.” I read Night Song of a Wandering Asian Shepherd. The students were great and listened. At the end, I said, “Now tell me why you don’t like it.” The first to speak said, “I didn’t like it until an hour ago, because they always stressed Leopardi’s answer – which I hate – but nobody ever highlighted the question that he poses, and this is my own question.” Right there, I understood that they hate Leopardi because he has always been proposed to them as the poet of pessimism, of nihilism, while – as Giussani used to say – Leopardi is in the question that he poses, not in the negation. So I said, “In fact, what Leopardi poses is ‘the’ question; then, one can decide to avoid this question, can give – like Leopardi – an answer that you hate, or can receive the grace – as happened to me – of encountering something that truly answers.” At this point, another student said, “I don’t want an answer, because I want life to continue to be mysterious. I don’t want anybody to take the mystery away from me. I don’t want to know in the morning how the day will end.” From this, a beautiful conversation started, which I am not going to recount here. When I left the classroom and I was talking with some adults about ethical issues, I couldn’t help telling them about this conversation

that I had just had with my students, because it was as if I had suddenly understood that the Movement was born from Leopardi, from this dialogue with Leopardi. If we don't recognize this, then we accept, for example, to talk about all of the ethical issues, but with a false premise – and we can even give answers that are the opposite of those given by the others, but that in the end are equally ideological.

What does this have to do with Page One?

That we cannot treat a tumor with Tylenol.

I find what you are telling us very meaningful, because it shows – and here we can see an example of what Page One says – how the powers that be reduce desire, that is, the nature of the “I,” the nature of the human question. Therefore, they don't recognize the question that the kids have, and they give them answers that, by starting from the already reduced question of many adults, are not helpful and do not correspond. Then, the kids rebel against the answer. This is why we said that Chapter 8 is so valuable: because it re-proposes the question. Fr. Giussani poses Jesus' question again: “For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?” He adds that, if we do not take this question seriously, we “close ourselves off from the most significant of human experiences.” And what happens when the most significant human question is proposed again? We start to recognize our human need once more. This is the starting point of Page One, because life provokes us – it provokes a teacher while she is teaching a class, it provokes everybody in today's discussion on values and new rights. It provokes us. But before being a matter of ethics, it is a matter of knowledge, that is, of what we are talking about, and of what the very nature of the “I” is. I am happy, because this morning I explained Leopardi at Catholic University and, without knowing that you would tell us this, I linked this question to the issue of new rights. Because when one reduces what Leopardi says (and Chapter 5 of *The Religious Sense* is full of Leopardi), then one looks for an answer in his own attempts. I told them, “Do you think that a person who understands the nature of the human question can solve the problem by, for example, changing sex (with the all of the difficulty and the suffering that this entails)? Do you think that making this choice legal would solve the problem?” We just need to understand the scope of the problem: that what we are looking for in what gives us pleasure is the infinite, and no one will be content with less than this infinite – said Pavese – because what we are looking for in everything, also in these different ways, is the infinite. All of the battles in favor of these new rights are a reduction of this desire, because when one is not satisfied, he either tries to avoid the question – as you were saying – or he tries to give an incorrect answer. Because he doesn't face the true provocation of reality! Only if he understands the nature of the question, can he then realize that the answer that he is giving is like using Tylenol to treat a tumor. However, if we don't understand this, then we don't even understand – as we said on Page One – why Fr. Giussani devoted himself to reawakening the totality of desire instead of waging a war over values (which doesn't mean that he didn't wish that people lived by following certain modalities that Jesus introduced into history and into life, which also result in certain values). Fr. Giussani's battle against the powers that be wasn't about specific things, but about the reduction of desire. This is not a problem that concerns others, but it is our problem when we respond to others by agreeing to play by their rules, making our answer a reactive presence that accepts the starting point of the reduced nature of the “I,” instead of being an original presence. The clash between two opposing views cannot make a student change his opinion of Leopardi from one hour to the next, unless something opens up his ability to understand. This is why Fr. Giussani doesn't go easy on a reduction of the answer! As he says at the end of Chapter 8, “Jesus Christ came to call man back to true *religiosity* [if someone

has questions about what true religiosity is, he can read Chapter 5 of *The Religious Sense*, where Giussani explains the nature of religiosity – with all of the ineradicable questions, the structural disproportion, sadness, boredom, and solitude as expression of this nature of religiosity; because Christ came to recall man to true religiosity, that is, not reduced to moralism, or devotion, or ethics, or feelings], without which every claim to a solution of those problems is a lie” (p. 97), on both sides. It is a lie! If desire is not reawakened, then one cannot respond – because in order to respond to the true nature of desire, something more than ideology is needed, any ideology. That is why, when we often say, “We won’t give a judgment on that issue,” it means that, for us, School of Community is not a judgment, Chapter 8 is not a judgment on reality, but it is simply the opportunity to come here once in a while to make comments, spiritual or sentimental, on the text. Therefore, the charism is not the criterion, the way in which I face reality, which first and foremost helps me not to reduce myself. Instead, this is precisely what documents the presence of Christ! We see who Christ is precisely because two thousand years after Him there is one – one, his name is Luigi Giussani! – who writes this chapter, which is the greatest thing against the common mentality, of any kind. However, for some people, this is a form of abstract spiritualism, and it is not effective, and so one has to do something else – when understanding this would actually be enough to allow us to face any discussion that we need to have on the various issues with true self-awareness. The problem is that, in spite of everything, on many occasions we start from the same reduction of which we accuse the others! This happens in a movement like ours, where, if we have received any grace, it was that of having someone who always talked to us about Leopardi’s desire as the symbol of true religiosity. A symbol, not for the answer that he gives, but for the totality of the question that he asks; because religiosity coincides with certain questions – as Chapter 5 of *The Religious Sense* says – that are absolutely unique, since they are total and ineradicable and demand a total answer, not Tylenol: a total answer to the totality of the question! If we really want to follow the charism, then each of us has to look at how he is facing all of these circumstances precisely in comparison with the text of Chapters 8 and 9. Because the resistance that we see, also in many of us, reveals that, in the end, there is no need for Christ, because Christ would be abstract, because the essential would be abstract, to use a fashionable word. And so? We have to do things, fill our life with other things – which can be great, but if it doesn’t have this within it, “every claim to a solution is a lie.”

I have a question, still on Chapter 8, on point 3, when it talks about freedom. At one point, Fr. Giussani describes the possibility of the choice that we have in front of reality, and he also talks about temptation and “realities which, to the free conscience, appear to possess psychologically stronger attractions than others which, in an ontological sense, are closer to the final goal.” My question is: How is it possible to recognize what we are made for, that is, to choose and decide what truly fulfills us, without getting confused by those realities that appear to have a psychologically stronger attraction? Because Fr. Giussani says that “freedom is the capacity the conscious being possesses for complete self-realization” (p. 97). Now, I realize that I desire to be fulfilled, but it seems to me that always, or in any case very often, I am not able to discern what is good, that is, where truth is, and what is instead a temptation. I think that the way to make a choice is through an attraction, and I don’t think that this is totally wrong; however, I see that it is a very confused and fragile criterion, because often it doesn’t lead me to become free, but instead it makes me remain stuck and not free, whatever choice I make in the end.

Do you see? This is an example of the same issue. What is freedom, as Fr. Giussani always told us? When are we free? When we can fulfill a desire. What is the nature of human desire? What we are saying: freedom is the capacity for satisfaction of our desire; we are free when this desire is fulfilled. However, like all human beings, we live the struggle with attractions that are psychologically stronger and seem truer than the true ones. Then, it is again clear that the people who make mistakes don't have a different nature from ours. The people who choose or advocate different ways have the same desire: we all want to be free, to reach fulfillment, satisfaction. They think that they can reach this satisfaction by following a certain path, which to them appears to be psychologically more attractive. Therefore, the issue is this: they have the same question that we have, and we often make mistakes, as they do, because we are not different. This awareness should already put us in the position of being really able to understand other people and have a dialogue with everyone, without reducing the human condition to ideology. You are saying that one thing is good and another is a temptation, and therefore we often feel that the criterion is fragile and confused. No, the criterion is not confused! We need to learn how to use it. The criterion is not confused. The criterion is objective and infallible! My dear, you don't decide when your life is fulfilled. So much so that, when you make a mistake – for example, because you chose a modality that is inadequate for your fulfillment and you went through with it – the criterion judges it: you find yourself unsatisfied, and this shows that the criterion is not confused and fragile. The criterion cannot be manipulated, not even by us. The problem is that we often realize this too late, when... We all remember the example of Fr. Giussani looking at his kids at a party: they were all there dancing. Who was thinking about how it would end? None of the kids. They were so attracted by what was happening that they were definitely not thinking that, at the moment of going to bed, all of the bitterness, or a certain disappointment, would have surfaced, even if everything had gone so well. Why? Because they lacked this education to distinguish what is good from what appeared psychologically more attractive. The one who is already educated, like Fr. Giussani, the one who is already mature because he has made a human journey and learned to judge, knows that partying cannot fulfill. Therefore, he stopped the dancing and told them, before it happened. Most of the time, we realize this too late, and then we say that the criterion is fragile and confused. No, the criterion is not fragile and confused! The problem is that – and this is the first advice from Fr. Giussani in the first chapter of *The Religious Sense*! – the judgment is the beginning of being freed. To judge is the beginning of being freed, because only if one starts to judge, does he begin to discern what is good from appearance – and then, little by little, he sees the difference between the sentimental repercussion and correspondence. For us, sentimental repercussion and correspondence are almost the same thing – but instead, they are radically different. This doesn't mean that correspondence doesn't contain a sentimental repercussion (because everything has a sentimental repercussion or attraction), but it is much more, because it is what corresponds to the heart's need. When one has made a journey, and is therefore mature, because he has learned to submit reason to experience, then, little by little, he starts to not be confused. When you learned math, the formula was correct, but you did not yet have enough experience with those kinds of problems to not make mistakes in applying it. The criterion is not confused, it is valid and true. It is the application that is confused. We need to learn in order to avoid mistakes in the application. When we constantly submit reason to experience, we learn, but then a decision is needed: having said all of this, we need to acknowledge our experience, what emerged clearly through experience. That is why it's not so important whether or not one makes mistakes, but that he learns from his mistakes. Many times, we have learned great things precisely from mistakes! The problem is not

making mistakes, but learning, and developing more clearly an ability to judge that doesn't get me stuck in partial solutions. There is also a warning light – in case we weren't yet fully aware of this – which is something objective: the Mystery became flesh and revealed to us what truth is, what true humanity is. If one is somehow not yet able to recognize it based on experience, there is a sign, not to spare us the experience, but as a guide in the moment of confusion: something doesn't add up here, the Church tells me something else, Jesus tells me something else. This doesn't mean that I simply submit to this and spare myself the desire to understand, but I go to the heart of the question, because Jesus and the Church don't want to mislead me. With regard to this, I received a question: "First of all, thank you for making us work on *Traces* Page One, because it forces me to verify every day, and the fact that my life is provoked is always a grace, because it shows me a path that helps me to understand more. For example, I realized that, first of all, Jesus reawakens desire in me – that is, He makes me desire everything again, which is something that I can no longer take for granted. On the contrary, often I no longer desire anything [you can see that the problem that we all have is this decline of desire, and for this reason, we find it difficult to judge – because when desire fails, the ability to judge also fails]. I am saying this because at School of Community we were asked: What do we defend in front of the attacks of the world? I felt paralyzed, because I didn't have an answer that brought to the surface everything that I am, to the point of wanting to defend it fiercely. I really need to start again from the experience of what reawakens me, otherwise I either invent Jesus or I no longer recognize Him, and in the end, He disappoints me [as we saw]. I am asking for your help: Can you give us an example of how you keep all of the factors of Chapter 8 present in front of your life's challenges?" Simply by taking it seriously. It is simple. By not reducing Chapter 8 – as well as the other School of Community texts – to something spiritual, to moralism, to an instruction manual. Right there, Fr. Giussani is telling us the truth of life, Jesus' conception of life, Jesus' gaze toward man that makes us aware of everything that we are. For this reason, if we follow – participating – the method that Fr. Giussani continues to propose to us – which is to verify in experience – then, at a certain point, we discover that we remember the factors, more and more of them. As he says at the beginning of the chapter, this human genius that we need to have in order to understand what is true – in short, to be able to discern – is the fruit of an education. The chapter's entire premise helps to identify a man among many men, 'the' man. What does Fr. Giussani propose? A kind of education, a human genius composed of natural sensibility, of some factors, and of an education. Only by participating in this education can we begin to recognize all of the factors of the present time without reducing them. On Saturday, I was at a university students' assembly, and I was surprised by how a student summarized the problem: "We are not informed about these issues." A person who says this after reading Chapter 8 of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* is admitting that Chapter 8 neither provides him with any 'information' on man's nature nor with a judgment on today's challenges, and therefore he has to look for them somewhere else. Do you understand? They can even let us do School of Community – it is not a problem, if we continue to think like everybody else, we look for information elsewhere, and the criterion for judging is given to us by others. Is the Fact that happened to us the criterion that we use to judge what we are living? Does the Fact that happened to us contain the judgment on everything, or do we have to look for it somewhere else? If we need to look for it elsewhere, then why is it still worthwhile to be a Christian? This is why it isn't a secondary problem, but it is essential, crucial! Without this, without responding to this, we lack the reasonableness of faith, faith lacks those reasons that make it worthwhile. Otherwise, Christianity will be one among many things in the pantheon of modern religiosity, where

everything is accepted, because in the end we don't have a criterion to judge everything that is born of what happened to us – not in order to impose it on another, but in order to be able to dialogue with everyone.

My question is still on Chapter 8, point 5 [The Law of Life]. I wanted to know what the difference is between service as sense of duty and service as gift of self. It is my everyday experience that, in facing all of the day's demands – the requests of my children, my husband, my job, the thousand things to do and to remember – I have the impulse and feel compelled to respond to everything, to do the right things and do them well. However, gradually, as I get tired and so on, I feel that all of this becomes suffocating. Then, my sense of duty – which, as a good wife and mother, would dictate that I respond to the person in front of me – deeply troubles me, and then makes me feel guilty for being so inadequate, for not having done what I should have done, and in the right way. In reading this chapter, though, I understand well how Christ came to change this way of serving the whole, and to show me the truth, the meaning, and the deep relevance of our human needs as the path and the possibility to experience the hundredfold in everyday life – and this is something that interests me. Then, I see that there is a consuming of oneself that brings one to peace, and a consuming that brings one to exactly the opposite, to feeling distressed. Where is the difference? I intuit that the sense of duty is responding to everything in a moralistic way, while the gift of self is responding to everything in a true, concrete relationship with Christ. However, I wanted to understand it well, because for me it would be a crime to stick the label “for Christ” on what I have to do: I wouldn't even last an afternoon! I wish you would tell me about when you have felt trapped, suffocated by your countless commitments and responsibilities related to guiding the Movement, or even before when you were in Spain. What happened? What was the turning point that made you live with another outlook, aware that human existence is a consuming of oneself for something and not for a sense of duty?

Thank you, because – as you can see – this is another way to pose the same question: whether we answer the provocations of reality that we have to face in a moralistic way, or as a gift of self – that is, in relationship with someone, with Christ. What does “in relationship with Christ” mean? It means that I live every circumstance as the opportunity, not to close the issue in a moralistic way, but to open myself to whatever the Mystery is reaching me through, which is the circumstance. You said that the book describes how it is fitting from a human point of view. The gift of self is fitting for us, and one understands very well when she is doing something because she loves the person she is married to, or only because, as a wife, she has the duty to do it. What is the test? When you start to think of your tasks as a duty – because at the beginning everything was the same, but at the beginning everything was seen as the possibility of a relationship, or to say to the person you love, “my love comes down to these details.” It was the opposite of moralism. Where is the difference? It is in how we reduce reality: whether, for us, the circumstance is simply something to endure or to do moralistically, or whether the circumstance is an opportunity to enter into a relationship. For me, this is a decisive turning point, because many times what you described used to happen to me. Instead, in encountering the Movement, I started to live these circumstances as the opportunity for a dialogue with Christ – like you said, as the opportunity offered to me right now to say “yes” freely, as if it were welling up from the spring now, as you would wish to say it to the person you love or to your children. This is what changes, and not because the difficulty of what I have to do changes. What changes is the nature of what I do, because the nature of what I do is either a strictly moralistic duty, or it is the opportunity offered to me to say “yes” freely to an

Other. This is what makes the difference. If a duty is moralistic, then sooner or later we suffocate, because looking for satisfaction only in a duty viewed moralistically is suffocating. Instead, if we throw open the whole breadth of the question, the whole extent of our desire, the whole mystery of reality, then it makes us breathe. It makes us breathe! On the contrary, if we get stuck in thinking that this will solve the problem – as often happens in the discussion on new rights – then in the end we suffocate. Everything has the same nature. Why? Because nothing challenges our mentality more than what the entire chapter says: dependence – which is to say that, in order to be fulfilled, I need to enter into a relationship, into a true relationship, because my happiness depends on this relationship. This relationship is not of secondary importance, it is not uncertain or superfluous, but it is crucial for the nature of the “I,” because the “I” is relationship. If one does not live everything within this relationship, then he suffocates. Instead, if every reality, every circumstance, is lived as the opportunity for a relationship, then it opens us wide. If one begins to realize that, through this, the Mystery constantly reawakens you and calls you to respond, things may not always be pleasant, but they make you start again. If one does doesn’t see all of these challenges, like the one we are facing now, as the opportunity to reach a greater self-awareness, to reawaken the self, if one doesn’t see the human suitability, then he doesn’t experience the hundredfold. In fact, I wouldn’t be who I am, if I hadn’t answered all of the provocations without dismissing them, or living them moralistically while complaining. No. Instead, it is about accepting any challenge, because if the Lord allows it, if He permits it, then that means that there is something for me.

I think that the most important part of Chapter 9 is when it states that “the mystery of the Incarnation establishes the method which God believed to be the right one to choose for helping man to approach Him,” and it says that it responds “to man’s nature which needs sensible reality” and “to the dignity of human freedom inasmuch as God takes it on as collaborator in His works” (pp. 103-104). I understand that this method responds to human nature’s need for concrete things, for a physical presence, because for me, the idea that God loves me is not enough – I also need to see Him now. It’s like with my husband – it’s not enough to know that he loves me; I need his presence, or some signs that speak of his love. Instead, I would like to better understand (in part, you said it earlier) the second part, on the collaboration with His works, the fact that God needs me and my freedom as collaborators in His works, because this collaborating is positive, and therefore it implies a pleasure in doing things. A dear friend told me that this pleasure means to recognize that we wouldn’t be completely ourselves without the relationship with this Other, that dependence, lived in this way, makes us experience freedom – and therefore, in anything that happens to you, you are free, you don’t just endure it. Well, I find that difficult right now, because I am tempted to live this dependence in a passive way: I am sure that I depend, and I am sure that everything that happens to me comes from Him, but...

How does the first part of the question connect with the second? Because let’s say this: on the one hand, we need to see Him now, as you see your husband’s gestures – Christ here and now, in reality. Does this help you to understand more, to sustain you in this collaborating that you are asking about? Because the whole problem is right here. The fact that you see the signs of your husband’s affection helps you and sustains you in your collaboration, in what you mean to do. The same happens here. The problem is that we find it difficult – making the comparison with the husband – because in the end, we don’t see Christ, and so what is Christianity? In the end, what is Christianity reduced to? To ethics, to something that I have to do, not to that companionship that I continuously touch in reality, that I see happening. Tell me if, in reading this chapter, with all of

the things that we are saying, Christ is not present! Not even in reading this chapter do we realize this. Isn't the fact that a person wrote it, the fact that many people have started to understand it, the sign of Christ's presence? Otherwise we would already be reduced in a big way! But we continuously have many of these signs. It's not that Christ – as the vast majority of people think – came, told us what we have to do, left, and will come back at the end of the world, and what is left in the flesh is just the husband! No, no, no. This is our standard way of thinking. No, no! Our problem, as you can see, is what is described in Chapter 9's premise: we don't recognize the answer, just as we didn't recognize it all through Chapter 8. And so I repeated the question "Who is Jesus? Did you recognize Him? Did this chapter help you to recognize Jesus?" Since we don't ask ourselves this question, because we aren't able to recognize Him, it is much easier to read the entire chapter in a moralistic way, as we are used to doing. We are almost all followers of Kant, because the Christianity that we speak of is Kant, and this is easy for us. The reduction that we make shows the difficulty that we have. This is our problem. Therefore, since we don't see Him in the chapter that is a celebration of His presence, then just imagine in reality, which is full of signs. What do you need to recognize your husband's signs? You need this openness, this simplicity, this ability to remain open to all of the ways in which the limits of human nature are transcended. Other people don't even see this. The problem isn't the lack of signs, but the fact that we don't see them. If we don't educate ourselves to this human genius – to use the term from Chapter 8 – it's not that the facts don't happen, there are a thousand of them – a thousand! – but we don't see them, and therefore we don't grasp the full power of the companionship of Christ, which constantly reawakens us and re-proposes this collaboration to us. Then we find ourselves saying once again: What more can I do? It is exciting for man to start to discover the desire to get his hands dirty and collaborate! The sign that we have recognized Him is the desire to collaborate! Not to do nothing like everybody else, and retire as soon as possible! This shows us to what extent the presence of Christ does not open us wide anymore, does not propel us forward, does not sustain our desire to get up in the morning in order to see where we will discover Him. This sense of mystery (mentioned by the kid quoted by the first witness tonight), of wanting to see where I will discover Him today, how He will meet me today, is lacking. Often, for us, the problem is: What do I have to do? Instead, the question is: Where will He appear? How will He encounter me? Where will He reawaken me? "Do you realize that I am here and you are not alone with your nothingness?"

I have a question to ask you. It may seem theoretical, but I hope that the daily urgency that I feel will be clear. In Chapter 9 [The terms of this new reality, p. 103], it says that "the Mystery of the Incarnation establishes a method which God believed to be the right one to choose for helping man to approach Him [...]. God saves man through man." It continues, "This method responds magnificently to man's nature which needs sensible reality" (p.104). During my days, I seek His face, that is, that love bestowed on me that corresponds to me totally and allows me to be myself, and therefore to live as a protagonist, not defensively. This search is becoming ever more compelling, and strives for an ever more concrete experience in the flesh. This results in a great expectation toward the companionship: I look for witnesses, people with whom I can share life, to whom I can ask openly, "What happened to you?" or "How did the School of Community influence you today?" which is to say, the journey that you propose to us. The day of School of Community or of charitable work isn't enough to express this. I often realize, though, that this search for a true companionship clashes with my limit (for example, I don't dare to bring up fully what

concerns me) or other people's limits – at times we are together, but we don't look each other in the face, we are superficial – and this leaves me with a wound that spurs me to give up on this depth in the relationship. This appears to me as something less in the daily encounter with Him. So, how can I recognize the Lord without continually discovering that I am leaning on someone or something that will never be totally correspondent? And how can I remain free from the human way in which He reaches me in the concreteness of my days?

The next witness will answer you.

The question “Who is Jesus?,” which you have been asking constantly over the past months, has deeply provoked me, in particular by making me question the truth of my experience, asking myself where I recognize that I have effectively grown, taken steps forward in discovering more clearly who I am. Last month, I went to a symposium with one of my professors and two friends, one of whom is not in the Movement. One evening, we went to dinner at the home of some friends who are in the Movement and live in that city, and I was a bit concerned because this young woman was there and, sincerely, I didn't know what to do. At one point, the discussion at dinner moved to the topic of abortion. My classmate who is not in the Movement didn't share our opinion, but what struck me is that I didn't find myself defending my position – as often happens – but rather proposing what, for me, is really true: I started from a clear judgment on a good that I have seen in my life, and that brings me to affirm that life, for me, is sacred, for the simple fact that I don't give it to myself. The following evening, we went out again to have a beer with these friends. At one point, as we were chatting, this young woman told me, “Do you know that I almost don't want to go back home to my friends? I am struck by your way of being friends.” That evening, I returned full of this question: What is taking hold of me? What is taking hold of my life so much that it makes me so daring – something I am usually not? I found myself answering that that evening, I became aware once again of the fact that what constitutes me is the relationship with Christ. I was very struck by this, because it made me retrace what this past year has been for me until now. I realized that, many times, I said yes to things that were proposed to me, but I did it because I was fascinated by the people who were proposing them. I was seeing that they were happy, and I wanted to be happy. However, I often stopped at this feeling, without going beyond it, and then it was no longer enough. Instead, I wanted to be like them, and this brought me to ask myself, more and more insistently, what made them like that. This was striking for me, because it started a relationship, a relationship with a true Presence in life, in reality – a Presence who answers when you ask, and who answers in the most unthinkable ways – for example, through this classmate of mine. This struck me a lot, because I often enter the day with the idea that Christ has to take hold of me here, and here, and here. Instead, He takes hold of me in the most unexpected ways. Reality hasn't changed, it is always the same – but the problem is my awareness of what grounds me.

In reading Chapter 9, I felt all of the objections and all of the resistance that the chapter describes. I am happy about it, because with all of the work that you make us do, I realize that I am taking what we say to each other less for granted. In recent years, in our School of Community, we haven't tried to close the issue of what we are living by giving the right answer, but we continuously ask ourselves not to take for granted what we are facing, and to make it personal. I had already read this chapter many times, and yet I clearly remember that, in the past, I felt that I didn't have the objections that are described there; I felt that I was fine. Instead, now I feel all of my resistance. I stopped at the title and asked myself: What is the claim? It is God who, in fact, is at the center of

my life. However, as I say this, the instinctive resistance wells up, and I can't do anything about it. At last, though, I see it and I face it. I have a question that is important to me: When it says, "His wonder-working responded to an ethical urgency, constituted a moral reminder, it was an education to the ideal" (p. 99), what does that mean? Does it mean, perhaps, that His working miracles responds to our nature, that it tells us that we belong to Him, that we cannot do anything without Him? In this sense, I understand Chapter 8 better. What is our nature besides belonging to Him? I am actually seeing that the miracle is reality that gradually becomes His, and therefore also more and more mine. For example, in the relationship with my students, what I teach often becomes an opportunity, for whoever wants it, to open up and confide the burdens that he carries in life. It is continuously clearer to me that, if we don't at least consider the hypothesis that we are His, life is truly hell.

We will end by connecting these three witnesses. "How can I remain free from the human way in which He reaches me in the concreteness of my days?" Do you see? Many times, we look for a concrete presence in the flesh, a historical presence – but sometimes this concreteness is not enough. Then one wants something more, and thinks that the problem is how to be free of the human way in which He reaches her. My friend, it is not possible, because He always reaches us in a human way! The problem is what our friend was saying about her classmate who is not in the Movement – that is to say, that one shouldn't stop at that human way by depending only on it, but that any human way introduces that relationship. Why? Because this is what we were told about the true way of following: to follow – this is what we learned – is to have the experience that we see others having, which then becomes more and more ours. You cannot experience this without a relationship with someone, just as you cannot learn math without a relationship with someone, but then things become more and more yours. It is not true that, at a certain point, we no longer need the relationship. We will always need it, because, as you can see, the possibility of reducing Christ according to the common mentality is frightening. For this reason, we will always have this need. In fact, as we have said on other occasions, we will always need the Pope, who is a historical point, a presence in history that guarantees the truth, otherwise we would become confused like everyone else. This allows us to have a true experience of following. It is the beginning of a relationship with a Presence that continually responds to all of the calls. How does it respond? In the way that the last person to speak said: through the miracle, through that beauty that He places in front of us, because when one encounters a person – a witness, to use the word that you used – who is a wonder, a reminder, then one wants to say, "I want to live like this person!" What is the greatest miracle? To see a new creature in reality, not just to see your leg healed. A new creature who, in the midst of all of the chaos, all of the confusion, all of the reductions, witnesses in his humanity to the victory of Christ. This is the greatest way in which Christ can recall us. This is the method of the Incarnation discussed in Chapter 9. Christ comes toward us through the method that is most suitable for us: a human presence here and now, a presence that we cannot dismiss if we don't want to lose the best of what happened to us. Why are we here? Why are we here, when many have lost the desire, the interest in being Christian? Only because we met a person, a "new creature" – to use Saint Paul's words – who fascinated us. This person is Fr. Giussani – and through him came this enormous desire not to lose what we saw in him. He was the strongest call that we received in our life. It is not, first and foremost, a moralistic call, but an attraction that we couldn't resist. Christianity will always be this, from the beginning until the end of the world.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, April 30th at 9:30 pm. We will work on the Introduction of the Fraternity Exercises that will take place soon.

The Fraternity Exercises are a gesture, and therefore, besides the lessons and the assembly, are also a time of silence, singing, prayer, and attention to the other. As we participate in such a gesture, we can reduce it, as we reduce School of Community: each person chooses, according to his own criterion, what to participate in or what to follow of the whole proposal! When something of the whole proposal doesn't suit us, we decide to do something else. It is possible to carry out a gesture of this magnitude only with everyone's collaboration. However, it is more than just "doing" a great gesture; it is the awareness with which we participate. If we do not go as beggars and we do not start praying now – praying! – for the Exercises, for each person's disposition, that we can be open to the way in which the Lord will call us, that He may give me – the one who has to preach them – the light to speak in the way most adequate to your needs, if we don't sustain each other, then what kind of gesture is this? This is not an organization, in which we give a speech and everything works out. It would be to deny the complexity of the human condition that we saw described in Chapter 8, as if the customary CL organization would suffice. Not even a bit! It's not that, in the end, Christ made a mistake: He could have organized things well, but He overlooked some details and had to die on the cross. Who missed something? He, or we, due to that reduction of the drama of living to something banal? If we don't go to a gesture like this with the awareness of our need and of what we are going to ask, to beg, to implore, then we will not be able to treasure all that the Lord may give us. Therefore, let's prepare ourselves to live this gesture in its totality, so that it may affect our life.

CL document for the European Elections. On the website, there is a document entitled "Is a New Beginning Possible?" that we as CL prepared, in view of the European Elections. This seems like a precious opportunity to tell everyone – not only in Italy; in fact, we will offer it to all of our friends in the European countries in which the Movement is present – where our hope for civil action lies, and what sustains the hard work of rebuilding.

The **Easter Poster** is available. It is a reprint of a beautiful image of Giotto's frescoes in the Cappella degli Scrovegni, with two texts, by Pope Francis and Fr. Giussani respectively.

“Jesus Christ loves you, He gave His life to save you, and now He is living by your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.’ This first proclamation is called ‘first’ not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the *principal* proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways. It is the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart. This conviction, however, has to be sustained by our own constantly renewed experience of savoring Christ's friendship and His message, convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known Him, not the same thing to walk with Him as to walk blindly. We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with Him it is easier to find meaning in everything.” (Pope Francis)

“As a result of the education I received at home, in my seminary training, and my reflections later in life, I came to believe deeply that only a faith arising from a life experience [he recalls Pope

Francis' concept of experience] and confirmed by it (and, therefore, relevant to life's needs) could be sufficiently strong to survive in a world where everything, *everything* said and says the opposite. Showing the relevance of faith to life's needs, and therefore – and this 'therefore' is important – showing that faith is rational, implies a specific concept of rationality. When we say that faith exalts rationality, we mean that faith corresponds to some fundamental, original need that all men and women feel in their hearts. It follows that a justification of faith entails describing ever more amply and intensely [pay attention, because otherwise we don't recognize Him in reality] the effects of the presence of Christ in the life of the authentic Church, the church whose 'guard' is the Roman Pope." (Luigi Giussani)

As we know, the Easter Poster is not meant to be put up just in our own room, but it is for a missionary gesture, because many are those who are waiting to touch the rim of His cloak.

Veni Sancte Spiritus