

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, March 28, 2012**

Reference text: At the origin of the Christian claim, chapters III and IV, McGill Queen's, Montreal, pages 29-48.

Song: "I wonder"

Song: "Il giovane ricco"

Glory be

Before starting to address the theme we proposed for today I would like to say a word on how to do School of Community, because this year we are trying to verify if the work of the past two years has started to become a method. If this is not the case we are back at the starting point and School of Community, as a gesture, does not help as it should (and we see it in the way we do it). Obviously, this implies some risks: it would be easier to come here to listen to a lecture and then go home, as someone proposes, but this would not give us the result we are trying to achieve, i.e. that a certain way of doing School of Community become familiar. However, since some people have doubts, I want to talk about it. A person writes me, "I think that doing School of Community as an assembly, notwithstanding the many examples and witnesses, is not helping in the specific work on the content of the text. Particularly, last time I felt that the contributions did not truly do a work of comparison with the text (that you define as crucial in this chapter). Each person reports an experience that, albeit meaningful, is disconnected from the text's content. At least, I did not see the connection [and it is important to see it, otherwise we do not learn]. The bottom line is that it is a 'school', so the first goal is a comparison with a teacher and with the content he proposes, first of all having the desire to understand what he is saying. Some of my friends and I feel the need for a moment in which the content of School of Community is 'presented' and addressed more in depth in light of its provocation for living our life." This presentation was already given on January 25th... Now it is the time to risk, even if sometimes we do not do our homework well. I am not concerned about this, because we do not come here to look good, but to learn. If you are concerned I am sorry for you, but I am not concerned. I am concerned that we may learn, and I am concerned first of all for myself. Therefore, the only way is that each of us witnesses to his own attempt, because this is how we can help each other to see if the attempt we are making is suitable for learning. This is the comparison we are doing here, as another person wrote to me after the last School of Community, "What a blow last night, to discover how alienated we are from ourselves, to the point of not even being aware that we – I, not the others – are living the reductions of Christianity. Fr. Giussani is warning us about. I have to say that without you I would have not understood this month of School of Community [the comparison is there!], despite [this is the point] reading it every day, despite attending every one of our meetings. It is under your gaze that I rediscover myself." This is what we have to help each other with. I happened to come across a text that I found useful to make a comparison. It is taken from *Something that comes first* [Traces 10, 2008], where Fr. Giussani describes once again what School of Community is. "The person who guides School of Community needs to communicate an experience in which the initial wonder is renewed, not just carry out a role or perform a 'task'. Communication of an experience cannot start out from a consciousness of oneself as a role, a vision of oneself as the person who has command of the subject matter or superiority, and the subsequent claim to be entitled to teach, because the only one who teaches is the Spirit of God; the Spirit is the one who makes the heart leap for the first time, and renews this experience. [Therefore] Those who guide School of Community,

communicating an experience in which the initial surprise happens anew, carry out this communication explaining, giving the reasons for the *words* used.” This is what we have to ask the Spirit: that each time we go to School of Community the initial surprise may happen anew, a surprise without which we cannot understand, even if we ‘explain’ it (because we reduce knowledge to explanation instead of knowledge to event). We understand things when they happen. Therefore, it is crucial that we help each other with this. A person writes me (I am going to read it, because I think that it is useful for the work we are doing), saying, “At the last School of Community you said that you were struck by the initial paragraph of the Introduction of the book. Particularly, you were struck by the fact that Fr. Giussani says that ‘to consider Christianity in a way that is not somehow reductive depends on the breadth and depth of one’s perception [...] of the religious sense.’ If we reduce the religious sense, that is, the nature of our ‘I’, we inevitably reduce Christianity as well.” The person writing to me says that he does not understand how this relates to what he read in today’s chapter, “ ‘An exploration of the religious sense does not tell us whether Christianity communicates a true or false announcement. I have already outlined this position in the first volume of this trilogy: the method is imposed by the object, not the subject. And since the religious sense is a phenomenon of the person, the method to approach it [...] is self-reflection. That Christ did or not say that he was God, whether he is God or not, and the fact that he is reaching us even today, is an historical issue. The method, therefore, must correspond to it and be as serious as the problem itself.’ Based on all this I understood that if I do not open up my heart, and therefore explore myself, I cannot understand the full import of the Christian message. Therefore, what Fr. Giussani says in the fourth paragraph of chapter 3 seems to be the opposite, that is, that we simply have to stay in front of the historical fact of Christ.” We have to understand two things. Fr. Giussani says that the religious sense is different from Christianity, because Christianity is an historical fact; therefore, it is not through an exploration of my own self that I understand if Christianity truly happened. However, at the same time Fr. Giussani says that unless I am present, totally wide open to this – which does not mean having to further explore myself, but being aware of myself and of the whole drama of which I consist – I cannot understand, I cannot grasp that the Christian event happened. Do you understand? The disciples had Him in front of them – we said this last time – but they preferred the success of their mission to His Person. Why? Was it because Jesus was not in front of them? No, but to grasp the difference present in Jesus they had to stay in front of Him with all their self-awareness. This is why if we do not understand these two things, that on the one hand it is not a matter of exploring ourselves, but that on the other without being aware of who I am I cannot grasp what Christianity is (because this is the essence of the book’s structure: a tender and impassionate awareness of my own self), for us Christ will be just a name. So, the point is to stay in front of reality with my whole humanity wide open to be able to grasp with my humanity if something happens that makes me say, “Ah! This is what I was looking for.” It is crucial to understand this, if we want to avoid confusing the two things. I hope I made myself clear.

So, the question we assigned to ourselves was to verify where we can recognize whether Christianity happened or not, because this is the question; now it is no longer a problem of reflecting on ourselves, but an historical problem: did Christianity happen or not? Are we alone with our attempts to live life, or did something different happen? Where can we recognize it? Where can we identify that this change of method happened? Right now we are not interested in knowing the consequences, as much as in recognizing that it happened.

As I tried to do School of Community keeping this question in mind, I have to say that for several weeks I was looking for this overturning of the method, for this fact that happened in my life, in events of a more or less recent past. Then something happened, actually something

very simple, that for me is invaluable, because I think it makes me experience all of the life and importance for the present carried by this 'overturning of the arrows'. In a moment of my life all in all peaceful in which, after some big changes in my work and in my life in general, I feel I have regained a new balance, I spent a beautiful spring Sunday: a bicycle ride with my family (one of the things I love most), and towards the evening the Christening of a friend's son, with a sense of joy, but also - forgive me for saying this - a bit of formality. There, during Mass, I started to hear the Gospel reading of Lazarus, Maria and Martha. Then, during the homily you explained this passage saying, "The gesture we are doing is greater even than Lazarus being raised from the dead, because Lazarus had to die again, while with Baptism the child is introduced to eternal life" (a mother knows well that she could not bear a different perspective for her son other than this). In short, a ceremony during which we heard things we had heard a thousand times before, and yet I was affected very deeply, because it was as if, under that gaze I relived through the Gospel's words and your homily, together with the presence of the faces of some friends, I re-discovered in reality that what I need is not 'my balance', but precisely that gaze that provokes in me a very painful longing; a longing that upsets me deeply, that makes you lose sleep and the ability to keep a clear mind about the things you have to do, but something you love and would not want to exchange with anything else in the world, because you understand that you are made for this. I do not know if this is what we are talking about, but I think that in my life the change of method is this fact that happens again; it truly happens again, it happens again in circumstances you do not expect (I did not expect that Sunday would end like this).

Thank you. This is what we are talking about, because first of all we are not talking about anything but a present experience. First point. One goes to a certain place thinking of going to a formal thing and finds himself in front of something that affects him deeply. It is simple. Where do we see it? It is from something like this – or what I hope we will hear from others now – that one has to retrieve all the words that refer to the overturning of the method that School of Community is talking about. This is easy for a child to recognize, we do not need a special intelligence to arrive there and see something that affects you deeply. Easy! Even children can be affected like this. This is how we have to try to recognize in reality the facts that witness to this overturning of the method.

A friend called me and said, "I would like you to meet two friends of mine and their father, because his business is not doing well and I would like you to help them to find a job." So, I met for lunch with these two sons, their father and my friend. The sons start to tell me about their father's problems, about the family business that is not doing well and that they have to close, they need to close, they are closing. In the meanwhile the father is silent. At one point the son says, "In this situation at least we have secured our father's house," and I say, "Perfect." Now the father, a man in his sixties, speaks and with reddened eyes he starts to say, "But, how can I send the letter to our suppliers?" (it is the letter that proposes an agreement in which the debts are renegotiated). He goes on, "I used to give the Easter Poster to these suppliers; I used to invite them to the gestures of the Movement...And also with what Carron is saying to us through School of Community, with all the work we are doing, is it really right not to sell the house to pay our debts?" In that moment I felt an inner shift, a shift! I was put in front of what my need is, what I desire, what is at stake, so much so that I immediately turned to the sons asking, "But what is our need? That your dad does not lose his house or the need of a man who stays in front of reality?" I felt free, present to myself. It is an event that corrects me, I who initially agreed about not selling the house.

What do we think of somebody who, in this situation, says, "But, is it right not to sell the house?" Do we think he got to this with an effort of the religious sense, or that he is crazy, or that something different happened to him?

A few evenings ago I was at dinner with some friends and, at a certain point one of the sons the person before me spoke about, started to talk saying, "My father has some difficulties and so we asked some friends to help us. During the trip there I kept thinking of all the problems my father has, of how to help him, of my anxiety, etc. I got there, I met these friends, these people, and never like in that moment I felt loved, embraced; so much so that during the trip back I was silent and the only thing dominating my mind was, 'but this was Jesus' embracing my life.' That's it, I do not want anything else; I am made for this embrace." He was telling me, "It was the first time in my life that I was telling myself, 'This is Christ's embrace.'" Then he added, "I have done charitable work for years, I deliver the bag of the Solidarity Bank to a family. A few days after this fact, as always, I went to deliver the bag to that family, but it was totally different, because I discovered myself free in facing those people. While I was discovering this sense of freedom, I also realized that deep down I had always brought the bag with a demand, as if the goal were a personal satisfaction. Instead, in that freedom I was becoming aware again of the fact that my only desire was for that embrace; that I was made for that embrace. But to do this, to reach this self-awareness I had to go back to that experience I had few days earlier."

A present experience: in the encounter with somebody something unforeseen happens. How can I recognize that something unforeseen happened (that is not something I create, but the evidence of a fact I have to surrender to)? That I feel free even doing charitable work, learning gratuitousness, without the demand to receive something back. It is impossible to generate this on our own; it is not the outcome of any attempt of mine. Christianity is something totally different: something new enters, and it would be enough if we looked at this to recognize how many times we reduce it to our own attempt, without letting ourselves simply be moved by a present fact that frees us.

A few weeks ago I discovered that I have cancer and I told myself, "Like John, Andrew and Simon I have been chosen by Christ, and in a crucial way for the second time. In fact, looking at my life two moments were crucial for my destiny, when Christ, through my sickness, came to me revealing Himself. The first time Christ called me was through the encounter with the Movement in college. At fourteen I got cancer, with serious physical consequences, to the point that the few friends I had left me. I got to college accompanied by a God that for me was something abstract, but with a great desire for happiness within me. When I spoke with the people at the 'Cl welcoming stands' for the freshmen, I was brightened by your gaze that accepted me for what I was: nobody had ever looked at me that way. Totally dazzled and surprised I started to follow you, and I started my journey in the Movement. The second time, as crucial as the first, was Christ's embrace during these days. In the last months my life had shrunk to a sterile life in my apartment and to a few schools of community I was attending with little interest. My heart had fallen asleep, but I was aware that it was still longing for the infinite and for the truth. Also here the Mystery intervened, through this illness that reawakened me, making me embrace once again the living presence also of some faces that I had not seen and talked to in several years. I told myself, "Christ was moved by me and He moved for me; He came to me. Now, with my heart full of Christ, who is something that is happening to me now, I want to live reality intensely; if I was able to face my illness at fourteen with the help of a God who for me was an abstract entity, imagine now that I can entrust myself to the Mystery revealed through some faces!"

Thank you!

Thank you.

Abandoned by the others, an unexpected gaze enters his life through something present. Let's be careful, let's not take this for granted, because he is not referring to a quote from the

Gospel, but to a present gaze! And each one of us needs to become aware of this because this is what reawakens one's interest in Christianity, in spite of everything. How can I explain this gaze two thousand years later? It's understandable if one were to quote a passage from the Gospel. However, the fact that one is invested by Christ's gaze and changed even two thousand years later, this is a present experience. If we don't start from here, we cannot really say whether Christ has happened as a fact in history or not. This is not a reflection on Christianity: Christianity "is not a matter of opinions, tastes, and (...) of analysis of the religious soul, (...), rather, it's an historical problem." The question is if this happens or not in the present. It's not an event only at the beginning (and then we can continue mechanically, by inertia), otherwise nobody could give himself this gaze nor could one regenerate it. This is why I am amazed when we talk about this gaze without considering what Fr. Giussani says: "Only the divine can 'save' the human, i.e., the true and essential dimensions of the human figure." The fact that now, two thousand years later, we find a gaze that saves the dimensions of the human, what does this say about the present divine? If we cannot grasp this, then we will not be able to do School of Community in the true way. School of Community would be reduced to reflections about the text, but we won't do what Fr. Giussani proposes to us: to have the same experience as the apostles. We'll see the result at the end: on one side those who have made a few observations about the text, and on the other those who have made a journey by retracing certain facts in the present (as was the case with the apostles). The result of the School of Community will be completely different. With the same ingredients, as I say all the time, we will have cooked different soups. We can see this in life. So it is decisive, in this moment, to focus on where the change of method is in order to grasp the traits that allow us to recognize what makes an event like Christianity possible in history. It's not that there is a method for the beginning of Christianity and another method for its development: it is the same! Only then we will be able to carry out this development peacefully, because it will be like the beginning happening again. But we are already too used to hearing about the gaze as something to be taken for granted, as if it were something obvious; yet, feeling this gaze upon oneself is not obvious. It's everything but obvious!

To answer the question, I would like to talk about two facts that happened at my job. One of my colleagues has decided to ask to be transferred to another department. When I asked her why, she answered: "This shouldn't interest you. And when you meet me outside of here, please don't say hello to me and don't ask me how I'm doing." I was very much taken aback. I thought I was good at relationships because of my personality, but, instead, I felt all of my incapacity and a total rejection. I could do like my colleagues who simply put the problem aside, but this was not enough for me. So I began to really wonder: what do I consist of? With this open question, another fact happened. Last Friday I attended a seminar about the "simplification of the administrative system" held by a magistrate. As I was listening to her speak, I became more and more fascinated by her reasonableness. She was talking about the goodness of life, about trust between citizens and public administration. I was also fascinated by her attitude towards the audience. What was happening in me was the famous vibration of the heart to which you have recalled us many times. So at the end I went to thank her, and I told her that it was comforting to know that she was present among our judges. I told her that I had noticed an openness of heart and mind that was a source of hope for me and my children. She came down from the podium from where she was talking and said to me: "Excuse me, can you repeat those words for me?" and I repeated: "Openness of heart and mind." And she said: "Nobody has ever told me such a thing, and I have wished for it so much...Excuse me, but I need to hug you." So I asked her: "Can I ask you a question? Are you a Christian?" She answered "Yes." And I said "Excuse me, but now I need to hug you."

In the room that, by now, was practically empty there was a friend of mine and, overjoyed, I began to call her out loud because I wanted her to come and see what was happening there in that encounter between that magistrate and I. With that open question I recognized Jesus' fundamental features. After these facts, this evening I came here because it was not enough to write to you, I wanted to see you because I am moved and grateful for your fatherhood in this moment that is so crucial. The experience of faith, i.e. of Jesus' loving embrace, renews that tender and passionate self-awareness, which helps me realize what my real need is. Ever since we began our satellite connection with your School of Community you have never missed the opportunity to challenge me to verify the convenience of faith for man. I have decided to accept your challenge. Thank you.

Thank you. "Nobody has ever told me such a thing." This is what the disciples said: they had never seen anything like that. But she says it two thousand years later! Please don't forget this.

I was chatting with my daughter about something that concerns me a lot, warning her from going after fashion (for example, many young people are crazy about certain clothes and everybody else follows them without thinking). This is something I care about a lot. So I was trying to challenge her, who is twelve, by saying: "But do you really like those things, or do you like it just because it is of 'that' particular brand? Does it correspond to you, or does it correspond to what the world tells you? Because otherwise you will end up thinking like the rest of the world thinks." And there something great happened –young people have a more transparent relationship with reality and with the Mystery –, because she said to me: "Is it maybe that you don't want me to think like the world because you want me to think like you?" She was clever.

They won't spare us!

Exactly. And that's the event: that she has an irreducible heart. I said to her: "No, I think it would be horrible for me to suggest that you think like me rather than like the world." And there I became aware of the change of method, because I stayed quiet; adding any extra word would have been like inviting her to build that bridge with which we deceive ourselves to get to the Mystery. I realized that there was a change of method precisely because I did not invite her to go where I was going, but we placed ourselves in front of a pure gesture of freedom which accepts or rejects the revelation of the Presence.

Thank you.

One thing that really amazed me recently is verything is already there in the experience. Saying this moves me, because I thought I knew it, I heard Fr. Giussani say it many times, and in my experience I myself have said it many times. But it is as if the path to this knowledge was opened up again.

Which means that not everything was there in the experience.

It was not there. A fact has helped me understand this, which for me is amazing because it is clear that at a certain point you start all over again, you begin to live again. I am a religion teacher at an elementary school. Now we are close to Easter and so I asked my fifth grade students: "What happens at Easter?" "Jesus resurrects." "And what does it mean?" This year their answer left me disarmed, because they looked at me and said: "It means that He is there but we cannot see Him." And I thought: Wow! But how is it possible for me to see this today in the present? So I started to work on this together with them. If I didn't have those faces there in front of me, if I had not heard your words, if I couldn't see and had not seen all that I have seen in the last two years, I would have not been able to work on this with them. What did I realize? That my reason had become weak, attached to a form, so I kept on repeating: "Yes, Jesus is risen." Perfect, but this did not affect reality. What have I found

myself saying today? Why, then, do I see that what we talk about simplifies my life, that it makes it gladder and truer? Because I have an experience, my experience as a journey to knowledge. So the children at the end were talking about Jesus' unmistakable features, today, in the present. So I was brought to say: if what is there wasn't there, if He was not there, if He was not there now, one would not understand what the Poster says. In 1988 I was so struck by it that I had hung it on the wall, however, I had sort of stopped at the sentence: "What we hold most dear in Christianity is Christ Himself" and I had not continued: "He Himself, and everything that comes from Him." Today, if I had to say what it is, I would say that from Him comes His present Presence, this story now. This changes everything completely.

Thank you.

Something quick, that happens to me a thousand times a day. Facing reality, I always begin from an analysis, the analysis of the person in front of me who, maybe, is talking to me about a problem, or of the situation of a problem that needs to be solved in reality, or, even more often, of myself, from an analysis to solve, to improve, to change, not to fall again. And I am always doing this. Sometimes I find a solution, like everyone else. But I am amazed that all it takes is a School of Community here, or sometimes even just picking up the book of School of Community and my analysis suddenly vanishes. This becomes macroscopic, for example, at the Fraternity Exercises: the answer to all my problems is much more pertinent than all my analysis, even if we don't talk directly about those problems. So everything suddenly gets unstuck (something that I would never be able to achieve with all my analysis).

When we read this text again bearing in mind what we talked about this evening, it will be easier for us to recognize all the signs that Fr. Giussani points out to us. I am going to list them to make it easier for us to make a comparison. First step: not a reflection, as in the religious sense, but a present experience that one bumps into (this evening we heard about someone who runs into a man who is ready to sell his house to pay back his debts, another one 'bumps' into a different gaze in the present, a gaze he had been waiting for all his life, another person 'bumps' into a gesture that gives him back his life). Second step: an easy evidence, even for children. Third step (what you heard from the last speaker): not the result of an analysis, but the act of recognizing, because all our analytic attempts cannot give us even an instant of that recognition. Fourth step: therefore, it's a love, and one becomes attached, like the disciples were glued to Him. Fifth step: an obedience is born, not in a moralistic sense, but, rather, a free obedience in order not to lose Him (the disciples, since they were struck by Him, didn't obey like the mass obeys its leaders. They were free). It's clear that something has happened because you have to take a position in front of it. But I wonder: how many of us, by working on these pages, felt that they had to decide in front of something that had happened? The text says: "Certain facts or signs (...) due to their radical nature (...) cannot be eliminated, censored. [So much so that] man is forced to either say 'yes' or 'no'." We heard this earlier in the song about the young rich man: it is not necessary to say 'yes', it can also be a 'no', but you have to give an answer. You have to. But, instead many times we spend weeks without deciding in front of something. Why do we have to? Why do we need to? Because – as Fr. Giussani says this in different ways – we bump into an absolutely irreducible Presence, that cannot be absorbed, we cannot assimilate it as if it were food! This is why many times we experience this resistance or uneasiness in front of this Presence, and we get scandalized by this. Instead I get enthused, because I say: this is the sign that we are in front of something irreducible. It is not a fundamental problem how much time we need to give in to the evidence; the problem is that we are in front of something irreducible, because this is our salvation. Paradoxically, this is our salvation, because if one

day we actually managed to control it we would find ourselves alone with our powerlessness, alone like dogs with our nothingness. Finding ourselves in front of something irreducible – irreducible like the Easter poster – is the opportunity for us. Why? What is the problem? That a fact is somewhat unavoidable, Fr. Giussani says. It doesn't seem like much, but Jesus has become flesh as an irreducible fact, as a presence. This is why Fr. Giussani didn't miss any opportunity to talk about the Incarnation, about God made flesh, born of a woman, something irreducible to an idea, to an opinion, to an image, to a feeling. This is our hope, our only possibility. In front of this one can either resist or accept; but one realizes that everything is at stake: if I don't recognize that gaze that makes me be myself, I should give up on being myself, something would prevent me from doing so. So then we ask ourselves: how many times this month have I felt the urgency within me to decide with regards to all my being human, all my humanity, all the possibility for fulfillment? This is why Fr. Giussani tells us that we can be convinced to be living as Christians without having solved the problem for ourselves. Because we can postpone it, and we can elude it in many ways. We know this very well, we are masters at this (we have a great imagination). We could even be doing the right thing, great works or other, but we elude the real question. The Easter poster – this is why we have chosen it – is a total challenge: it is an invitation to stay in front of something irreducible. At Easter we celebrate exactly this irreducibility: we can see men's resistance and our resistance which is what brings Christ to death. But He remains inexorably present because He is irreducible even to our attempts, and this is our hope. And so we ask to be able to stay in front of this present irreducibility without which there is no hope.

Our next School of Community will take place on Wednesday, May 23rd at 9:30 pm. We will work together on the first part of the Fraternity Exercises.

During Holy Week the Church proposes to us some gestures exactly to put in front of our eyes what we just talked about. This year's School of Community helps us particularly to identify ourselves more consciously with what Jesus lived in these days: all of our resistance, all of our rejection, all of the rejection of the world. But not even this managed to get rid of Him. We have not been able to get rid of Him because He is risen, and He continues to give each one the possibility of starting over through the method with which He reaches us. It is for this gratitude that we want to celebrate with all of ourselves this feast, to thank Christ for his faithfulness and to ask Him to put an end to our stubbornness.

The April issue of Traces will have on *Page One* the synthesis of the Responsibles' Assembly which took place in Pacengo di Lazise at the beginning of this month. I suggest that you read it and work on it, because it is a judgment on the historical moment we are living.

The Book of the Month for April is: Attila the Hun, by Louis De Wohl.

In particular, in this novel I want to point out the dialogue between Emperor Valentiniano and Pope Leo – as Attila is about to arrive in Rome –, which emphasizes the Pope's awareness of the Church's nature and task, of this presence, absolutely irreducible to any power.

Please remember that the Fraternity Exercises will begin with dinner at 7 p.m. so that we can start our lesson at 9 p.m.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Happy Easter to everybody!