



# CHRIST IS SOMETHING THAT IS HAPPENING TO ME NOW

by Julián Carrón

Presentation of Fr. Luigi Giussani's book *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*.  
January 25, 2012, Teatro degli Arcimboldi, Milan (and via satellite link throughout Italy).

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I greet every one of you, particularly the civil and religious leaders who are taking part in this moment and the many friends here present and in video link in towns throughout Italy. I thank also Paolo Zaninoni and Ottavio Di Brizzi, the representatives of Rizzoli Publishing Company.

We have chosen this way for continuing the journey of the "School of Community." After *The Religious Sense*, we shall tackle *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, which is the second volume of the "Trilogy" offered by Fr. Giussani.

"There came a Man, a young Man, who entered the world in a certain town, a certain place in the world that can be identified on a map, Nazareth. When one goes to the Holy Land, to that little town, and enters the shadowy hut where there is an inscription on the wall that reads *Verbum hic caro factum est* (the Mystery of God, here, was made flesh), he is overcome by shivers."

The song *Et incarnatus est* (And was made flesh), from the "Great Mass" in C minor by Mozart, is "the most powerful and convincing, the simplest and greatest expression of a man who recognizes Christ. Salvation is a Presence: this is the wellspring of the joy and the wellspring of the affectivity of Mozart's Catholic heart, of his heart that loved Christ."

*Et incarnatus est*—Father Giussani says—"is singing at its purest, when all man's straining melts in the original clarity, the absolute purity of the gaze that sees and recognizes. *Et incarnatus est* is contemplation and entreaty at the same time, a stream of peace and joy welling up from the heart's wonder at being placed before the arrival of what it has been waiting for, the miracle of the fulfillment of its quest. [...]"

Would that we too, like Mozart, could contemplate with the same simplicity and intensity the beginning in the world of history of mercy and pardon, and drink from the wellspring that is Mary's "Yes!"

This beautiful song helps us to collect ourselves in grateful silence, so that, in the heart, the flower of our "Yes" can germinate and come up. [...] Just as it was for Mary, this girl from Nazareth, in front of the Child who had come out of her: a boundless relationship filled her heart and time.

If the religious intensity of Mozart's music—a genius which is a gift of the Spirit—penetrated our heart, then our life, with all its restlessness, contradictions, toil, would be beautiful like his music." (L. Giussani, "Il divino incarnato," ["The Incarnate Divine"], in *Spirto gentil. Un invito all'ascolto della grande musica guidati da Luigi Giussani*, Bur, Milan, 2011, pp. 54-55).

How better could we begin this gesture than by listening to this, as contemplation and as entreaty?

*Et incarnatus est*\*

\*"Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est" ("By the working of the Holy Spirit He was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was made man," soprano: Joo Choo, piano: Luigi Zanardi). W.A. Mozart, Great Mass in C minor K.427. See also "Spirto Gentil" CD No. 24 (2002).

It is difficult to find an artistic expression that grasps better than *Et incarnatus est* than T. S. Eliot: "...a moment in time and of time, / A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history: transecting, bisecting the world of time, a moment in time / but not like a moment of time, / A moment in time but time was made through that moment: / for without the meaning there is no time, and that moment / of time gave the meaning" (T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from "The Rock"* in *Collected Poems 1909-1935*, Faber & Faber, London, p. 97).

Before this event, God made flesh, which expresses all God's tender passion for man, we cannot avoid saying, with the psalmist, "What is man, that You should keep him in mind, mortal man that You care for him?" (Ps 8:5).

He is nothing, only a twig swept away by the wind. And yet You became man for every one of us. Anyone who has an instant of simplicity and lets the Christian announcement come in cannot avoid the same leap of joy that Elizabeth felt inside her when she was visited by Mary who was carrying Jesus in her womb. "The moment Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child in her womb leapt for joy" (Lk 1:39). This is what happens to us, too, today. Miserable as we are, God made flesh is announced to us today. We are no longer alone with our nothingness. In this moment of confusion, in which many are feeling their way in the dark, we are given the grace of this news. Who would not want to

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman.



live every instant of his life under the pressure of this incomparable emotion, generated by his presence?

But is it really possible?

### I. A CHALLENGE FOR MAN TODAY

“Can a cultured man, a European of our day, believe, really believe, in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ?” (Cfr. F.M. Dostoyevsky, *The Notebooks for the Possessed*, edited and with an introduction by Edward Wasiolek; translated by Victor Terras, University of Chicago Press, 1968). This phrase of Dostoyevsky sums up the challenge before which faith in Jesus Christ finds itself today. This is not a generic challenge, it does not raise the question as to whether faith in Jesus Christ is possible in the absolute. The crucial aspect of the Russian writer’s question lies in his reference to a precise context—the present day. And it is addressed to a concrete type of man—a culturally formed individual, one who does not relinquish the use of his reason in all its power, in all its demand for freedom, and in all its capacity for affection. In other words, a man who does not renounce anything of his humanity; a man who has behind him a cultural history, a demanding heritage, who is under the influence of a pervasive rationalism, a spontaneous trust in scientific method and a suspicion of everything that does not submit to reason as the measure. For a type of man with these char-

acteristics, is it possible today to believe in what Christ said of Himself?

In other words, has the Faith some hope of taking root, that is to say, of fascinating, of attracting, of convincing the men of our time?

But this question does not refer only to those who have not met Christ. It refers to us, too, for whom, after many years since we have met Him, Christ remains far from the heart, as Fr. Giussani reminded us in 1982:

“You have grown up, and while you have secured a human ability in your professions, there is the possibility of drifting away from Christ (in contrast with the emotion of all those years ago and, above all, certain circumstances of all those years ago). There is a kind of drifting away from Christ, except in particular moments. What I mean is that there is a drifting away from Christ except when we set ourselves to pray, a drifting away from Christ when, for example, you do something in His name, or in the name of the Church, or in the name of the Movement. It is as if Christ were far from our heart. With the old poet of the Italian Risorgimento [Renaissance], we could say, ‘Busy with other business’ (*In tutt’altre faccende affaccendato*). Our heart is, as it were, isolated or, rather, Christ remains isolated from the heart, except in particular circumstances like >>

» prayer, commitment, when there is a meeting, or School of Community to be led, etc.

This distancing of Christ from the heart, apart from certain moments in which His presence seems to be at work, generates another distancing, which reveals itself in an ultimate embarrassment amongst us—I am speaking of husbands and wives, too—in an ultimate mutual embarrassment. [...] The distancing of Christ from the heart distances the ultimate aspect of my heart from the ultimate aspect of your heart, except in everyday actions (keeping house, looking after the children, etc.). There is a relationship, no doubt about it; there is the mutual relationship, but only in operation, in tasks, in common actions in which you find yourselves. But when you find yourselves in common action, this tends, gradually, to obscure the horizon of your eyes and of your feelings.” (L. Giussani, “Familiarity with Christ,” May 8, 1982, in *Traces*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2007, p. 2).

That this is not only something regarding the past, a friend recently observed: “Since I had encounters both with the community and with individuals, I recently realized that, since the CL Beginning Day gathering, ‘Reality is positive’ has been the guiding thread, and this has been documented by the flyer on the crisis, too, as a judgment for the whole situation we are living. But it risks being empty, not so much of understanding, as of existential certainty. At times, I feel a kind of unease, a kind of triumphalism in what we do that wants to contrast the tragedy of an existence without hope. Often, we are not sure of the journey we are making in the face of reality as it actually is. We agree with that judgment, we have understood, but we are not convinced, we are not truly attached to the truth of our life with affection.” You only have to observe the reactions of many of us before the affirmation of the positivity of reality to see how pertinent this judgment is.

We all know how far we have to go to overcome this distance at which we keep the event of Christ present. So the question we have just put to ourselves appears in all its drama: has faith a real possibility of overcoming this distance and taking root in us?

In a conference held in 1996, then-Cardinal Ratzinger replied to this question, affirming that faith can still be

successful, “because it corresponds to man’s nature. Man has within him a longing and an unquenchable nostalgia for the infinite” (J. Ratzinger, *Fede, Verità, Tolleranza* [*Faith, Truth, Tolerance*], Cantagalli, Siena, 2005, p. 143). With these words, he was also pointing out the condition needed. Christianity needs to encounter the humanity that vibrates in each of us in order to show its whole potential, its whole truth.

The book we are presenting is an attempt to explain this approach for answering the inescapable need for reasonableness.

Fr. Giussani tackles this question right from the Preface: “*At the Origin of the Christian Claim* is the attempt to define the origin of the faith of Jesus’ Apostles. In it I have tried to express the reason why a man can believe in Christ: the profound human and reasonable correspondence between his needs and the event of the man Jesus of Nazareth. I have tried to show the ev-

idence for the reasonableness with which we attach ourselves to Christ, and then are led by the experience of the encounter with His humanity to the great question about His divinity. What makes us grow and broadens our mind is not abstract reasoning, but finding in humanity a moment when the truth is reached and spoken. This is the great inversion of method which marks

the passage from the religious sense to faith: no longer a search full of unknowns, but surprise at a fact that has happened in human history” (*All’origine della pretesa cristiana* [*At the Origin of the Christian Claim*], Rizzoli, Milan, 2001, p. VI).

In order to grasp the novelty of this approach, we need to take note of this fact: what broadens reason so as to enable it to recognize Christ is not abstract reasoning, but rather the correspondence between man and Christ, which is realized in a real, historical encounter in the present, a correspondence that constitutes the very reasonableness of faith. This is what makes the journey of faith simple. And it is precisely when this encounter does not take place—when, on one hand, Christianity is reduced to a discourse, to a doctrine, to morality, and, on the other, man’s humanity is similarly reduced—that man and Christ find themselves totally opposed to each other, with a deep chasm of estrangement between them (it is a parable that comes down to us from the age of modernism): a distancing, as we said.

**What broadens reason so as to enable it to recognize Christ is not abstract reasoning, but rather the correspondence between man and Christ, which is realized in a real encounter.**



Jesus and Zacchaeus.

With this observation, Fr. Giussani puts us on guard against the greatest risk we can run in beginning the work of the School of Community this year. What is this risk? For the great majority of us, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* is a book we already know. The temptation, therefore, to think we have nothing more to learn is more present than ever. Thus, we can easily fall foul of the reduction of Christianity to a “doctrine.” Usually, we expect the novelty of a difference—to do or read something different than usual. But the novelty lies not in the difference (in work or in your husband and wife), but in the happening of something that we desire. And there is no greater event than that in which we find the correspondence to the needs of our heart. It is only the happening again of this event that can overcome the distance between Christ and our heart.

If Christ does not happen again as an event, the more time passes, the more that “ambiguity of ‘growing up,’” of which Giussani speaks, overwhelms us. He says, “What we have received settles down in such a way that it bears fruit, but the heart, precisely the heart, in the literal sense of the word, seems to share in my embarrassment this morning. It seems to be embarrassed with Christ, as if there were no longer this familiarity with Christ that made itself felt, albeit with the sentimentality typical of the age, in a particular time of

our life. There is an embarrassment that is His being distant, like a non-presence, a not being decisive for the heart. In actions no, in these it can be decisive (let’s go to Church, let’s build the Movement, let’s say Compline, let’s do School of Community, let’s go and do some charitable work, let’s go to organize groups here and there, and let’s throw ourselves into politics). In activities, it’s not lacking; it can be decisive for so many activities, but what about the heart? In the heart, no!” (L. Giussani, “Familiarity with Christ,” May 8, 1982, in *Traces*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2007, pp. 2–3).

So the real question is: what is needed in order to make Christ’s correspondence to the human heart as clearly recognizable as possible; that is to say, in order for the Christian experience to happen?

## 2. A TENDER AND IMPASSIONED DISCOVERY OF MYSELF

The first paragraph of the book reveals at once that Fr. Giussani is very much aware of what is required for man to recognize this correspondence. This book offers us the whole methodological genius of his approach. “It would be impossible to fully grasp the meaning of Jesus Christ without first grasping the nature of the dynamism that makes man man. For Christ presents Himself as an answer to what ‘I’ am, and only an attentive—and even tender and impassioned—perception of myself can open me up and prepare me to recognize, »»

Jesus Gives Sight to the Man Blind since Birth.



» to admire, to thank, and to live Christ. Without the awareness of what I am, even the name of Jesus Christ becomes merely a name” (L. Giussani, *All’origine della pretesa cristiana [At the Origin of the Christian Claim]*, Rizzoli, Milan, 2001, p. 3).

In order for man to be able to grasp fully what Jesus Christ means, he has to stand before Him with all his humanity. Without this humanity, without this attentive, tender, and impassioned awareness of myself, I will not be able to recognize Christ. The reason is simple—because Christ presents Himself as an answer to what I am. Without this awareness, even the name of Jesus Christ ends up becoming merely a name.

It’s hard to find a higher estimation of the person than that offered by Christianity. Christ does not mean to enter secretly into a person’s life, as if taking advantage of a distraction. He wants to enter a man’s life through the main door, passing through his humanity, a fully conscious humanity, made of reason and freedom. Christ submits Himself to scrutiny by man’s in-born criterion, his heart. Without this scrutiny, there is no Christian experience, and Christianity would have no chance of succeeding. The American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out the reason clearly: “Nothing is more unbelievable than the answer to a question that is not asked” (R. Niebuhr, *Il destino e la*

*storia*, Bur, Milan, 1999, p. 66).

So if man has the original structure for recognizing Christ, where does the problem lie? What makes this recognition so problematic? The fact is that our original structure is often buried beneath the crust of the influence of society and of history. If he is not awakened from his torpor, freed from his own measure, from an adulterated, watered-down version of his own needs determined by the context, man will, in varied measure, be blocked or delayed from noting the correspondence that enables him to recognize Christ.

We can recognize this reduction in ourselves, too, from the embarrassment we feel at the “tenth leper” (cf. *Lk* 17:12) or at Christ’s reaction to the disciples’ jubilation at their missionary success (cf. *Lk* 10:17-20): we, too, content ourselves with cures, like the other nine lepers, or with the success of the disciples. We don’t feel the need for anything else, and so our hearts remain far from Christ.

A Christianity reduced to a discourse, or even worse, to ethics, cannot respond to this existential position in which man finds himself, partly due to historical reasons. But this is also the great opportunity that our present situation offers Christianity: that of grasping that none of its reduced versions can answer the pressing needs of man today. For in order to grasp

the value of a moral or religious personality, we need to possess a human genius, that is to say, “an original openness of the soul...an original attitude of willingness and dependence—not self-sufficiency” (L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queens University Press, 1998, p. 8).

And only a Christianity that presents itself in its original nature as an event in history is able to arouse the humanity that enables man to recognize it, by piercing through the crust that keeps covering it.

### 3. CHRISTIANITY IS A FACT

In his *Life of Jesus*, François Mauriac describes the first appearance on the world scene of that presence that immediately imposed itself as a “problem” and since then has had percussions on history right up to the present: “After forty days of fasting and contemplation He came back to the place of baptism. He knew already for what encounter. ‘The Lamb of God!’ says the prophet as he sees Him coming (surely in a whisper...). This time two of John’s disciples were with him. They looked at Jesus, and that look was enough: they followed Him to the place where He lived. One of the two was Andrew, Simon’s brother; the other John, the son of Zebedee: ‘Jesus looked at him and loved him.’ What is written about the rich young man, who would go away sad, is taken for granted here. What did Jesus do to keep them there? ‘As He saw they were following Him, He said to them, “What are you looking for?” and they answered, “Rabbi, where do You live?” He said, “Come and see.” They went and saw where He was living, and stayed with Him that day. It was about the tenth hour”’ (F. Mauriac, *Life of Jesus*, quoted in L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010, p. 3).

Let’s ask ourselves: How could John and Andrew have been won over so suddenly, to the point of acknowledging they had met the Messiah? “There is an apparent disproportion between the extremely simple way it all happened and the certainty of the two. If this fact happened, then recognizing that Man, who that Man was, not in depth and detail, but in His unique and unparalleled (‘divine’) value, must have been easy. Why was it easy to recognize Him? Because He was *exceptional* beyond compare” (L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J.

Prades, *Generating Traces...*, *ibid.*, p. 7).

“What does ‘exceptional’ mean? When can something be defined ‘exceptional’? When it corresponds adequately to the heart’s original expectations, however confused and hazy one’s awareness of it may be” (*Ibid.*). It is precisely this exceptionality that, when it happens, reawakens man’s original experience, however confused and hazy his awareness of it, so that thus awakened, he can express a judgment as regards that exceptionality.

How can we define a phenomenon like that which we have described?

“Christianity is an event. There is no other word to indicate its nature: neither the word law, nor the words ideology, concept, or plan. Christianity is not a religious doctrine, a series of moral laws or a collection of rites. Christianity is a fact, an event. All the rest is a consequence.

The word ‘event’ is therefore crucial. It indicates the method chosen and used by God to save man: God was made man in the womb of a fifteen- to seventeen-year-old girl named Mary, in ‘the womb where our desire did dwell,’ as Dante says. The *manner* in which God entered into relationship with us to save us is an *event*, not a thought or a religious sentiment” (*Ibid.*, p. 9).

**No one would deny that Christianity is an event. But if it is reduced to a fact of the past, or to a category, what remains in the present is merely ethics.**

But wait a minute. Before going ahead, I want to tackle the temptations that we are exposed to. Thanks at least to the frequency with which we have heard Fr. Giussani refer to it, no one would deny that Christianity is an event. But we often reduce the event to something in the past—whether we are dealing with the beginning of Christian history 2,000 years ago, or the moment of our own personal encounter—when we don’t simply reduce it to an abstract category. But if it is reduced to a fact of the past, or to a category, what remains of Christianity in the present is merely ethics. Like when the event of love ends between two people, all that remains are the things to be done, the tasks to be performed. Fascination is already left behind and the distance between the two keeps growing.

So what do I mean when I say that the nature of Christianity, just like that of falling in love, is an event? Fr. Giussani himself told us in the words printed on last year’s Easter Poster: “The ‘event’ does not in- >>

» dictate merely something that happened and with which it all started, but what awakens the present, defines the present, gives content to the present, and makes possible the present. What we know, or what we have, becomes experience if what we know or have is something that is given to us now—if there is a hand that offers it to us now, if there is a face that comes forward now, if there is blood that flows now, if there is a resurrection that happens now. Nothing exists outside this ‘now’! Our ‘I’ cannot be moved, aroused, that is, changed, if not by something contemporaneous—an event. Christ is something that is happening to me.” If we compare the way in which we often speak of Christianity with this description Fr. Giussani gives it, we can measure how far we distance ourselves by the fact that we take it for granted, as something already known, and we can see how unaware we are of this reduction we make by acting in this way. “So, in order that what we know—Christ, the whole question of Christianity—be experience, there needs to be something present that provokes us and shakes us: a presence as it was a presence for Andrew and John. Christianity, Christ, is exactly what it was for Andrew and John when they were following Him; think of when he turned around, and how they were struck! And when they went to his home... This is how it is, even up to now, up to this moment!” (Comunion and Liberation, Easter Poster 2011).

If the event is not contemporary, there is no development, and the event slips back into the past, going further and further back in time. Thus, the years go by, and instead of filling the gap that distances us from Christ’s heart, it makes it wider.

The experience that Fr. Giussani witnessed to us was quite different, and even more so as the years passed: “Running up against the presence of a different humanity *comes before*, not only at the beginning, but in every moment that follows the beginning—a year or twenty years later. The initial phenomenon—the impact with a different humanity, the wonder born of it—is destined to be the *initial and original phenomenon of every moment of development*; there is no development if that initial impact is not repeated, that is, if the event does not remain contemporaneous. Either it is renewed, or nothing proceeds, and right away you theorize about

the event that has happened [becomes a category], and you fumble about seeking substitute supports for What is truly at the origin of the diversity. The originating factor is, permanently, the impact with a different human reality. Therefore, if what happened at the beginning doesn’t happen over again and isn’t renewed, then true continuity doesn’t occur; if you don’t experience now the impact with a new human reality, you don’t understand what happened to you back then. Only if the event happens again now can the initial event be illuminated and deepened, thus establishing continuity and development” (L. Giussani, “Something That Comes First,” *Traces*, Vol. 10, No. 10, 2008, p. 2).

Fr. Giussani concludes: “Continuity with what happened in the beginning, therefore, will only happen through the grace of an ever-new and wonderstruck impact, as if it were the first time. Otherwise, in the place of this wonder, there will be the domination of the thoughts that your cultural evolution makes you capable of organizing, the criticisms that your sensibility formulates for what you’ve experienced and what you see living, the alternative that you would claim to impose, etc.” (Ibid.).

So, the manner that the Mystery chose to reach us—a fact, an event, not our thoughts or our feelings—

is that most fitting to man’s historical condition and is the only one able to overcome the distance separating us from Him: “To be recognized, God entered man’s life as a Man, with a human form, so that man’s thought, imagination and affectivity were, in a way, ‘blocked,’ magnetized by Him. The Christian event has the form of an encounter, a human encounter in ordinary day-to-day reality, capable of attracting all our affection and all our freedom.” The Christian event does not wait for man to change, it does not require preparations or preconditions; it simply breaks in and happens, like falling in love. Thanks to its unique capacity to correspond to the original needs of the heart, His presence is able to reawaken these needs in all their potential, often buried beneath a thousand layers of sediment, and to open wide all man’s reason, magnetizing all his affection. Before the presence of the answer, the question is unleashed in all its boundless depth. “What marks the phenomenon of an encounter is a qualitative, perceptible difference in life. To en-

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*Jesus Meets the Woman Taken in Adultery.*

counter means to come across something different that attracts us because it corresponds to our heart. So it is subjected to the comparison and the judgement of reason, and causes freedom to come forth in affection” (L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op.cit., p. 19).

This is exactly what Fr. Giussani called the overturning of the religious method. “The hypothesis that the Mystery has penetrated man’s existence by speaking to him in human terms alters the man–destiny relationship which will no longer be based on human effort, the fruit of man’s construction or imagination, the study of a distant, enigmatic thing, or on waiting for something absent. Instead, it will mean coming up against something present. If God had manifested a particular will in a particular way in human history, if He had charted a pathway of His own leading us to Him, the central issue of the religious phenomenon would cease to be man attempting to imagine God, even though this attempt is the greatest expression of human dignity; instead, the issue would lie in freedom’s pure and simple gesture of acceptance or rejection.” This is the overturning of the method. “No longer is the focal point the striving of the intelligence, the drive of the will to construct, the stretching of the imagination, the weaving of a complex moralism. Rather, it is the simple recognition, the reaction of one who, watching out for the arrival of a friend, singles him out in the crowd

and greets him” (L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit, p. 31).

This marks the beginning of an adventure for knowledge. “When we meet a person who is to be significant in our lives, there is always that first instant when we have a presentiment, when something inside us is almost forced by the evidence of an unavoidable recognition: ‘That’s him’ or ‘That’s her.’ But only time and space dedicated to reiterating this evidence will bolster the existential weight of our initial impression. Only sharing life enables this impression to penetrate more and more radically and deeply within us until, at a certain point, it is absolute. ...From sharing His life, would emerge a confirmation of that exceptional, different quality that had struck them from the first moment. In sharing His life confirmation grows.” For Fr. Giussani, “If it is true that knowledge of an object requires time and space, there is all the more reason for this law to apply to an object claiming to be unique. Even those first to encounter this uniqueness had to follow this same road” (Ibid., p. 52).

With his usual genius, Fr. Giussani draws our attention to two points of method that are precious for reaching an existential certainty over the Mystery that entered in, to be part of history. The first refers to the fact that “I will be able to be certain about you, to the extent that I pay more attention to your life, that is, that I share in your life. The signs leading to cer- >>

» tainty become multiplied in the measure in which you pay attention to them. For example, in the Gospel, who was able to understand the need to trust that man? Not the crowd looking for a cure, but those who followed Him and shared his life.” The second element that Fr. Giussani invites us to consider regards this fact: “The more powerfully one is human, the more one is able to become certain about another on the basis of only a few indications. This is typically human genius. Rousselot stresses it in this moving text: ‘The quicker and more penetrating the mind is, the more effectively a slight clue suffices to lead it to a certain conclusion... This is why an incontrovertible tradition, going back to the Gospels itself praises those who have no need of wonders. They are not praised for having believed without reasons; that would only be reprehensible. But we see in them truly illuminated souls, capable of grasping a vast truth through a tiny clue.’ Even though man, in order to survive, is naturally endowed at a fundamental level with this capacity for understanding a tiny clue, it needs time and space in order to evolve. And this is the gift essential for understanding the claim Jesus makes. The proliferation of signs about His person leads to the reasonable conclusion that I can trust Him” (Ibid., p. 42). It was precisely the signs that triggered the question “Who is He?” They were unable to find a more adequate answer to this question than the answer He Himself offered.

This last observation introduces us to the great theme of faith. For, “the attitude of one who is struck by the Christian event, who recognizes it and adheres to it, is called ‘faith.’ Our position regarding the event of Christ is the same as that of Zacchaeus before that Man who stopped under the tree that he had climbed, and told him, ‘Come down, quickly, I am coming to your place.’ It is the same position as that of the widow whose only son had died, and who heard Jesus saying, in a way that appears so irrational to us, ‘Woman don’t weep!’ It is absurd to say such a thing to a mother whose only son has died. For them, as for us, it was the experience of the presence of something radically different from what we imagine, and at the same time something that totally and originally corresponds to the profound expectations of our person. ...Faith is having the sincerity to recognize, the simplicity to accept, and the af-

**Christ submits Himself to verification by our heart. He does not ask to be believed a priori. This is why the “Christian claim” is the most imposing challenge a man can find himself facing.**

fection to cling to such a Presence. ...Essentially, faith is recognizing a Presence that is different, recognizing an exceptional, divine presence. What is exceptional does not happen normally, and when it happens, one says, ‘This is something quite different. There is a super-human power here!’ Think of how many times the Samaritan woman had thirsted for the attitude with which Christ treated her in that instant. She had never realized it before, but when it happened she recognized it” (L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op. cit., pp. 20, 22).

Faith, understood in this way, is as far removed as can be from “belief” estranged from human nature. It implies a journey of awareness that involves reason, affection, and freedom before a fact without compare!

“Faith is part of the Christian event because it is part of the grace that the event represents, part of what it is. Faith belongs to the event because, as *loving recognition* of the presence of something exceptional, it is a gift, it is a grace. Just as Christ gives Himself to me in a present event, He brings to life within me the capacity for grasping it and recognizing it in its exceptionality.

Thus my freedom accepts that event, and acknowledges it” (Ibid., p. 23).

But how can I know that what faith adheres to is true, is real?

#### **4. A NEW HUMANITY: PUTTING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH TO THE TEST**

So what happens when the Christian event happens to me? My humanity flourishes: “Christianity is an event that man happens across, and in which man discovers himself as ‘of the same blood’: it is a fact that reveals the ‘I’ to itself” (Ibid., p. 9). “When I encountered Christ I discovered myself a man.” This phrase of the Roman rhetorician, Marius Victorinus, describes well what happens when faith is a real experience. This exaltation of humanity expresses all the reasonableness of the Christian faith.

When you recognize the event of Christ (faith), you live everything in a new way. This new “subversive and surprising” way of living day-to-day life (L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza [From Utopia To Presence]*, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, Milan, 2006, p. 330)—as Fr. Giussani used to say—proves the truth of the en-



Jesus at the Pharisee's House (Magdalene, detail).

counter: Christ exalts reason, Christ exalts affection, Christ exalts freedom! “What reason does faith have? The reason that faith has is that it realizes my humanity with its needs, it improves it, and makes it grow” (Ibid., p. 359). And who would not want this exaltation for himself?

We are together in this adventure to support each other. To prevent the experience in which we have been involved crystallizing in doctrine, our support cannot have any other logic, over the course of this year, than that of witness. But this does not alter the totally and definitively personal level of the question. Only I can answer before the Lord to the Christian claim. Christianity, Fr. Giussani insists, “happens in communion, but is played out in the freedom of each person” (Ibid., p. 327). “The whole question lies in the real faith of the person. Consequently, the only and dramatic problem is personal faith, faith as an answer to one’s own human situation; this is the only, dramatic problem of every day and of every hour, because faith is a challenge to freedom; there is nothing more given, more granted than faith, and nothing is less automatic” (L. Giussani, *Il rischio educativo* [The Risk of Education], Società Editrice Internazionale, Turin, 1995, pp. 162-163).

Christ’s initiative in our life, the Christ-Event, arouses and solicits our freedom, challenges it like nothing else, at the beginning and in every moment of our journey. Fr. Giussani states this clearly, “Jesus Christ did

not come into the world as a substitute for human effort, human freedom, or to eliminate human trial—the existential condition of freedom. He came into the world to call man back to the depths of all questions, to his own fundamental structure and to his own real situation. If certain values are not safeguarded, all the problems man is called to resolve in the trial of life do not dissolve but become more complicated. Jesus Christ came to call man back to true *religiosity*, without which every claim to a solution of those problems is a lie. The problem of the knowledge of the meaning of things (truth), making use of things (work), of human awareness (love), human co-existence (society and politics), lack a proper formulation, and so, to the extent that religiosity is not at the foundation of the search for their solution, they generate ever greater confusion in the history of the individual and of humanity as a whole. (“Everyone who follows Me will have eternal life and a hundredfold on earth”)” (L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit., p. 97).

The hundredfold in terms of affection, of reason, and of liberation is reasonableness in the act of faith, and constitutes the overcoming of every opposition between Christ’s divinity and my humanity, my heart and Christ.

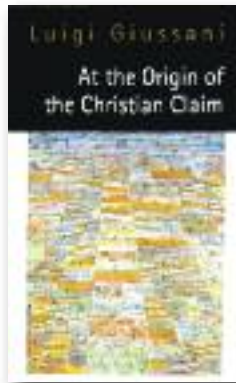
In this way, Christ submits Himself to verification by our heart. He does not ask to be believed *a priori*. This is why the “Christian claim” is the most imposing challenge a man can find himself facing, because >>

» it mobilizes all the resources at our disposition—reason, affection and freedom—to carry out a verification. No one can take our place, not even Christ did so: “Faith cannot cheat, it cannot tell you ‘It’s like this,’ and win your approval just like that. No! Faith cannot cheat because in some way it is tied to your experience. In the end it’s as if it were to appear in court with you as the judge, using the criterion of your experience. But neither can you cheat, because in order to judge it you have to use it, in order to see whether it transforms your life you have to live it seriously; not faith according to your interpretation, but faith as it was handed down to you, authentic faith. This is why our conception of faith is directly connected with the hour of the day, with day-to-day life as we live it. ...If you fall in love with a girl, or have had a few experiences of being in love, and have never perceived how faith changes that relationship, if you have never said to yourself, ‘How faith throws light on this tentative relationship, how it changes it for the better!’ If you have never been able to say something of the sort (and instead of a girlfriend, you can put anyone else—father, mother, and so on), if you have never been able to say, ‘How faith makes my living more human!’ If you have never been able to say this, then faith will never become conviction, will never become constructive, and will never generate anything because it has not touched the depth of your ‘I’” (L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro [The “I” Is Reborn in an Encounter]*, Bur Rizzoli, Milan, 2010, pp. 300-301).

A year ago, at the presentation of *The Religious Sense*, we resolved to live the religious sense as a verification of faith, trying to answer Fr. Giussani’s apprehension: “We Christians in the modern climate have been detached not directly from Christian formulae, not directly from Christian rites, not directly from the laws of the Christian Decalogue, but we have been detached from the human foundation, from the religious sense. We have a faith that is no longer religiosity. We have a faith that no longer answers as it should to religious sentiment, we have a faith that is not aware, a faith that no longer understands itself” (L. Giussani, “La coscienza religiosa dell’uomo moderno” [“The Religious Awareness of Modern Man”], *pro manuscripto*, Centro Culturale “Jacques Maritain,” Chieti, November 21, 1985).

In the same way, today we resolve to go ahead with the same verification by tackling *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*. What does this mean? What is the verifica-

tion that Christ, as a present event, has entered into our life? The fulfilling of humanity, the hundredfold in reason, affection, freedom, we said. This remains the essential and irrevocable verification of the reasonableness of faith, of the truth of the Christian proposal, the evidence of its credibility. But the heart of this verification is, through conversion, an increase in faith itself, the loving recognition of His presence. “Your presence is better than life.” The summit of verification is the birth of an expectation, of a loving knowledge that grows as the experience of correspondence grows; it is an affection that embraces all other affections.



The cover of the book.

At the heart of the experienced hundredfold, the deepening of the relationship with Christ predominates—a familiarity, a tendency to affirm Him, an ease in recognizing Him (as St. John said, “It’s the Lord!”). The most profound change is faith itself. In the ongoing daily encounter with His real presence, our entreaty, our endless thirst finds its answer and at the same time is exalted and broadened, and so recognizing Him as the only one able to answer becomes easier and in a certain sense more “inevitable.”

The direction of our road this year could be summarized with a phrase of St. Paul: “...but I press on to make it my own, since Christ Jesus has made me His own” (*Phil 3:12*). Christ has made each of us His own. The more Christ has made me His own, the more I am intent in the race to make Him my own again. In the long run, what we are pursuing is no longer even a change, that is, our own measure of the hundredfold, but His presence, a relationship with Him. This is the case in every loving relationship that is fully human—nothing can satisfy but the presence of the loved one. This sets in the world an irreducible figure of man, not satisfied with any “intermediate” objective, with a few cures, a little success, but always striving forward, attracted by His presence, and therefore a free agent in history, an indomitable re-builder of ruined houses. And this could be our contribution to society.

For our journey, Fr. Giussani always recommended a gesture, which summarizes the whole content of the Christian event: the prayer of the *Angelus*. It will be a clear sign of our being on a journey.

### *Angelus*

I thank you all for your attention and participation. **T**