

Generating Traces

in the History of the World
2019-2020 School of Community

NEW TRACES OF CHRISTIAN OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, Javier Prades

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Suggested Fall Schedule

Meeting 1: What is School of Community?

Meeting 2: Andrew and John, pp. 3-8

Meeting 3: God's method, pp. 8-11

Meeting 4: What an event is, pp. 11-13

Meeting 5: A difficulty in understanding, pp. 13-14

Meeting 6: Religious sense and faith, pp. 14-17

Meeting 7: The Christian event has the form of an encounter, pp. 17-20

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What is School of Community?

Meeting 1: Introduction

- *How to Tackle School of Community*
- *Notes from a dialogue with Giussani*

School of Community is the educational method through which we come to *recognize* and *adhere* to the event of Christ in our personal journey. The School of Community consists of reading and personal meditation of the text proposed, comparing one's own life experience with what was read, and sharing the change the mystery of God has on oneself. The texts proposed are usually those of Luigi Giussani, or his successor, Julián Carrón.

Participation to School of Community is free and the meetings take place preferably in public venues such as a workplace, a school, a church, or a coffee shop.

For a description of the method of *School of Community*, read *How to Tackle School of Community* and the *Notes of a dialogue with Giussani* about School of Community in this guide.

One common difficulty in approaching texts written by Giussani lies in the fact that the meaning of certain recurring essential words such as *heart*, *reason*, *authority*, *need*, *experience*, *risk*, or *freedom*, are quite different from those which we commonly assign to them. To facilitate the comprehension of the text, you will find a glossary of the definition of the more essential words in this guide.

The Christian Event as an Encounter

- 1. Andrew and John**
- 2. God's method**
- 3. What an event is**
- 4. A difficulty in understanding**
- 5. Religious sense and faith**
- 6. The Christian event has the form of an "encounter"**
- 7. Faith is part of the Christian event**
- 8. A Fact in the present, a fact in the past**

1. Andrew and John

Meeting 2: Summary, pp. 3-8

Christianity is the announcement that God took the initiative of becoming a factor of human experience, a fact that happened in history, an exceptional presence. John and Andrew “*followed Him from a distance, afraid and embarrassed, yet strangely, profoundly, obscurely, magnetically moved to curiosity.*” (5) They were won over “*after listening to that Man for hours, watching Him speak, a precise impression had slowly formed in their heart.*” (6) They easily *recognized* he was *exceptional* beyond compare. This is the Christian method.

Exceptional is when what the most ‘natural’ happens, when the satisfaction of the *ultimate* desire of our heart and the needs for which we actually live and move finds a response. In a sense, to come across an answer to these needs should be the most normal thing, yet it is supremely exceptional. It is the exceptionality of Christ’s presence that makes Him easy to recognize. John and Andrew felt an unimaginable correspondence. “*It was easy to **recognize** him, and very easy to live in a relationship with Him. It was enough to **adhere** to the bond He generated, a deep **sympathy.***” (8)

Meeting 2: Questions

[R] Giussani states that the Christian method is ‘*come and see*’ (5). Can you describe the steps of the Christian method? How is the Christian method related to *faith* as a method of knowing (see old words, new meaning section in this guide)?

[R] What is ‘*correspondence*’ (7)? How does it work? According to Giussani, nothing is more natural than the answer to the needs of the heart. (7) What are these needs? Where do they come from?

[R] Giussani uses several expressions describing the impact the encounter with Christ had over the disciples. He describes it as something that “*magnetically moved to curiosity*,” (5) something that “*won them over at once*” (6), something that felt like an “*unimagined, unimaginable correspondence to the heart that they have never experienced*,” (7) he generated “*a deep sympathy*,” (8) “*generated a precise impression*” (6)? What is the meaning of these expressions?

[C] What is the role of the person’s freedom in this dynamic? Can a person refuse to be “*magnetized*”? How is it for you?

[C] What experience of ‘*correspondence*’ do you have in your life?

[C] Giussani states that Christ’s exceptionality is easy to recognize, that Christianity is ‘*easy*’. It is enough “*to adhere to the bond He generated, a deep sympathy*.” (8) What does it mean in your experience that Christianity is ‘*easy*’?

2. God's method

Meeting 3: Summary, pp. 8-11

'Event' is the word that best describes the nature of Christianity, it describes the method chosen by God to communicate Himself (10) to save man. *"Christianity is not a religious doctrine, a series of moral laws or a collection of rites. Christianity is a fact, an event."* (9)

Christianity is the event - *"something that was not there before and arose at a given point"*(8) - of an exceptional human presence that posits itself as the method chosen by God to awaken the person to the discovery of the factors that constitute him - *"reveals the self to itself"* (8) -, to open him up to his destiny, and to sustain him on the journey towards destiny - gives rise *"to a process whereby the person becomes aware"*(8) of himself and his destiny.

That is how it was for Mary, John and Andrew. *"This is how it is today with us: an event can mark the beginning of a journey. The event can point to a method for life."* (10) It is an experience to be had that requires the total engagement of the person who is struck by the event.

Meeting 3: Questions

[R] Giussani insistently states that Christianity is an ‘event’ and not a religious doctrine or a series of moral laws. Yet, Giussani does not deny the existence of doctrine and moral laws. What is the ‘*added value*’ Giussani introduces in our understanding of Christianity? Does his insistence of Christianity as an event change the way we understand the doctrine and the moral laws?

[R] Giussani states that the category of *event* is “*the supreme method of cognition,*” a “*method for life*” that “*sets a process in motion.*” (10) Can you explain what Giussani means?

[C] Giussani states that to be saved means that a person “*recognizes who he is and his destiny*” while also discovering “*how to direct his steps towards it.*” (9) What experience do you have of being saved? How are you directed towards destiny?

[C] In your experience, what is the difference between *knowing* and *being aware*?

3. What an event is

Meeting 4: Summary, pp. 11-13

If we do not understand and use the term 'event', we will not understand Christianity. We will reduce Christianity to the mere outcome of human activity. (13) Since man's salvation happens through an *event* - God's chosen method, it behoves us to clarify the meaning and consistency of this method.

1. The closest word to 'event' is 'chance'. 'Chance' refers to something *happening* that is not of our making, both *unforeseen* and *unforeseeable*. (11)
2. The dynamic of the event describes every instant of life. Every creation is an event: the birth of a baby, the blooming of the wild flowers in the field. All realities have as their common denominator the fact that cannot be analyzed in all its factors since all realities contain "*a vanishing point*." (12)
3. Every relationship, every act of knowing are an event. An event is a fact that surfaces within experience and reveals the Mystery that constitutes it. "*To glimpse something greater in the relationship with everything means that the relationship itself is 'event'*." (12) Moreover, if we do not look at the world as something given, as an event, everything will lose all its attraction, surprise, and moral appeal. (12)

Meeting 4: Questions

[R] Giussani states that if we don't understand that Christianity is an "event", we will reduce Christianity to the work of man. (13) What do you see that is lost when we reduce Christianity to *religious doctrine* and moral laws?

[R] What does Giussani mean by "*vanishing point*"? (12-13)

[C] Giussani states that if a person "*does not look at the world as something given, as an event,*" the world "*loses all its attraction, surprise, and moral appeal.*" (12) What is your experience of this statement?

4. A difficulty in understanding

Meeting 5: Summary, pp. 13-14

'Event' is the word that the modern mentality, and therefore each one of us, finds hardest to understand and accept. Nothing is met with greater resistance than the thought that only an 'event' can awaken us to the truth of our self and to our own destiny. (13)

Since the event enters into the experience that a person is having, it can be object of reason, it can be known. Human reason reaches its apex when it recognizes things for what they are: proceeding from an Other. Those who grasp, instant by instant, the relationship of everything with the origin is given an unimagined intensity of life. To recognize and adhere to things as they are is what we exist for, it is our happiness. (14)

There is a wound in our heart that distorts our vision and makes the person unable to remain in truth by one's own strength. Because of this wound, each person tends to fragment, to separate the particular from the whole and identified the particular with life's aim. Escaping this fragmentation is not in our hands. (14)

Meeting 5: Questions

[R] What is Giussani's understanding of *reason*? How is it different from the common use of this word?

[C] "*In the Christian language nothing is perceived with greater resistance than the word event.*" (13) Why is that? How is it for you?

[C] "*Recognizing reality as deriving from the Mystery should be familiar to reason*" (14) but it is not. "*The experience we live everyday is that men tend to identify the totality of life with something partial or limited.*" (14) Why is that? What helps you to use *reason* according to *its own very original dynamic* (14)?

5. Religious sense and faith

Meeting 6: Summary, pp. 14-17

All 'religious experiences' are born of the need for total meaning, the *religious sense*. Faced with this enigmatic incommensurability, every man has creatively sought a place "*upon which to build the 'site' of his relationship with the Mystery. Thus, religions are born.*" The hostility of the modern mentality towards the word *event* is reflected in the way Christian '*faith*' is nothing more than an aspect of the religious experience. (15) Yet, the Christian event is not a *religion*. The Christian revelation is not man's creative effort to reach the Mystery, but the opposite.

The Christian event is the Mystery's self-revelation. "*While the religious experience springs from the need for meaning, **faith** is the **recognition** of an exceptional presence that totally corresponds to our destiny and the **adherence** to this Presence.*" (16)

Christian faith is the *memory* of a historical fact that reaches me in an exceptional way. "*A man exists, a man to whom I can say You, who says 'without me you can do nothing'.*" (16) We never measure ourselves completely to this claim.

Meeting 6: Questions

[R] Giussani states that the Christian event is not a religion. Why does he say that?

[R] What is the *religious sense*? What is *faith*? How are they different?

[R] How is *faith* an act of reason?

[C] According to Giussani, "*faith is the recognition of an exceptional presence... and the adherence to this Presence.*" (16) What is your experience of faith in your life?

[C] Christian faith is the *memory* of a historical fact that reaches you in an exceptional way: "*A man exists, a man to whom I can say You, who says 'without me you can do nothing'.*" (16) What experience do you have of this?

6. ... has the form of an encounter

Meeting 7: Summary, pp. 17-20

“The christian event has the form of an encounter, a human encounter in ordinary day-to-day life.” The Christian event is something that penetrates our eyes and touches our hearts. (17) An encounter with a sacred reality, a living human presence in space and time whose meaning is *“that of being a visible sign of Christ’s presence, God made man.”* (18) This encounter with an *exceptional presence* is what continually orients our life. *“Without it, there is no source of awareness of life’s newness.”* (18)

To encounter means to come across, to intercept someone that attracts us because it corresponds to our heart. Therefore, to the person who encounters this different, this *exceptional presence* is beckoned to **recognize** him as such by comparing and judging with the needs of the heart, and to cause freedom to **adhere**. (18-19)

The encounter is a moment that marks the beginning of a journey. The encounter is always tied to a specific moment in which what happened, who was encountered defined everything (it was all embracing). From that point forward, that encounter becomes the shape of all relationships, the way to look at oneself, at others, at things. (20)

Meeting 7: Questions

[R] How do you recognize that you have intercepted an *exceptional* presence, a “*sacred reality*”?

[C] What is your personal experience of an encounter? How did you recognize its *exceptionality*?

[C] How does your encounter shape your friendships, your marriage, the way you work Today?

7. Faith is part of the Christian event

Meeting 8: Summary, pp. 20-26

The disciples experienced a total correspondence between His presence and the expectation of the heart. “*The attitude of one who is struck by the Christian event, who recognizes it and adheres to it, is called ‘faith’.*” (20)

Faith is a gift of grace. A person is able to recognize Christ’s presence because Christ wins the person over. Just as Christ gives Himself to me in a present event, He brings to life within me the capacity to *recognize and adhere* its exceptionality. (23) Man’s contribution lies in accepting that “*all is grace*” and begging for grace. Grace cannot be bestowed without the person asking for it. (24)

Peter’s recognition of the origin of Jesus’ *exceptionality* is not enough to make him automatically consistent. Peter *recognizes* Jesus as the *son of God*. He loves Jesus, wants to love Him. Yet, adhering to Jesus by relying on his strength of will and personal commitment is not possible for he is a sinner. He needs grace. In Peter’s statement: ‘*You know that I love you,*’ Peter *recognizes* that the horizon of his life is Jesus’s presence, and asks for the grace to *adhere*. This is offering: “*the ultimate consequence of faith.*” (26)

Meeting 8 - Questions

[R] What is faith? What does *simplicity* and *sincerity* have to do with faith? What do they have to do with knowledge? What is the relationship between faith and reason? Why is faith the fulfillment of reason? why is faith reasonable?

[R] Giussani states that to *recognize* and *adhere* to an exceptional presence is impossible without grace. Why is that?

[R] What is offering? Why is offering the ultimate consequence of *faith*?

[C] Giussani states that “*faith is having the sincerity to recognize, the simplicity to accept, and the affection to cling to such a Presence.*” (21) What experience of faith do you have?

[C] Have you noticed a difference when you live your day offering? What happened?

8. A Fact in the present...

Meeting 9: Summary, pp. 26-29

John and Andrew had encountered a present fact that fulfilled God's covenant with Abraham. The event of Christ is the fulfilment of the prophecy, "*an encounter that fulfilled a previous beginning.*" (27)

The encounter that gave rise to Polycarp's faith drew all of its value, its content, its consistency from the man Jesus of Nazareth. "*The encounter that happens today is source of memory because it means coming across a presence that begins in the past.*" (27) It is the same for us now. "*Memory indicates that the encounter finds its root in the past. Therefore, the present encounter makes us discover the original event, which in turn is the foundation of, and is decisive for the truth of the present encounter.*" (28)

Faith is the awareness of a presence that began in the past. Memory is the history that runs from the origin up to the present. The material content of *memory* is also called *tradition*. (28)

All the educational work that needs to be carried out, especially with the youth, depends on making understand that Today's experience of Christian life is equal to what the medieval monks lived, and to what John and Andrew lived before then. (29)

Meeting 9 - Questions

[R] What is *memory*? What is the content of *memory*?

[R] According to Giussani, the formulation of Christianity as “*an event in the past that claims the meaning of one’s life can be found in the experience of a present event*” (28) has an apologetical value that is important for countering any clerical attempt to stand before the world. Instead, the formulation of Christianity as “*a present event, one that claims to have a definitive and all embracing meaning for one’s life, can be explained only in virtue of an event in the past*” (28) has a pedagogical value. What is the difference between the two formulations? Why is the second formulation pedagogical and the first one is not?

How to tackle School of Community

In order to get the most out of reading this book, we propose you read it following a number of steps outlined by the author. The steps can be summarized as follows:

[read]

The book offers a *tradition*, a *hypothesis*, a way of thinking about oneself, the world, and God. Therefore, the first step is to get to know this tradition, to listen carefully and precisely to what the author has to say. Pay special attention to the meaning of certain recurring essential words: *event*, *encounter*, *heart*, *authority*, *need*, *experience*, *freedom*. The meanings of these words are quite different from those which we commonly assign to them.

Some hints: Read the text multiple times: the easiest way to understand any text is to read repeatedly and with attention. Highlight and annotate the text, write your questions and comments in the margins. Doing so will help you to understand the text's internal logic.

[compare]

Reading carefully and precisely will then allow you to compare and contrast what you have read with your *elementary experience*, your *heart*. This is the moment of *criticism*: the moment when you sift through what has been presented by the author in order to ascertain its value.

Some hints: Consider keeping a notebook in which you can jot down your experience, questions, and personal reflections. Make note of the moments in your life in which you recognize that you are living what the author speaks about, as well as passages that provoke you and/or demand a change in the way you think or face certain aspects of life.

[share]

By sharing with one another, you participate in a unique communal event in which every active participant can come away changed or desiring to bring about personal change. The community is the place where a person's *freedom* is affirmed, overcoming the fear aroused by *risk*.

Some hints: Sharing means witnessing to your own personal dialogue with the text, and the impact that this dialogue has had on you. The more your own personal dialogue is vibrant, the more the moment of sharing will be lively. Talk about life in light of the text and avoid talking about your opinions or comparing the text with other authors you have read.

The role of the *leader* is critical for the success of the sharing step. The leader is the *authority* that fosters growth. The person who assumes this role is an *authority* when he or she models the steps outlined above: [read], [compare], and [share]. If the leader lectures instead of modeling the method, then he or she will not help others to grow. At the end of the meeting, the person leading should attempt a synthesis, which highlights and recaps the most important contributions shared, boiling them down to their most essential core. The leader should steer clear of personal thoughts or musings at this moment of the communal work.

Notes from a dialogue with Giussani

The proposal and method of the Movement

The Movement was born out of the desire that people know Christ in such a way that His presence be perceived as fascinating and persuasive. The ‘genius’ of the Movement’s charism is pedagogical (a method).

The proposal of the Movement is embodied in the School of Community which presents the most important content to pay attention to and which is the point of reference to judge one’s life¹. The personal *daily*² engagement with the text of School of Community is the privilege way to maintain a systematic relationship with the charism³ of the Movement.

The *method* of the Movement aims to propose Christianity as a present *event* where Christ persuasively reveals himself⁴, and Christian *moral*ity as a tension to let the *event* of Christ invest all of life: tension to belong, to adhere, to confront all of life with what the *event* of Christ here and now.⁵

Therefore, to maintain a systematic relationship with the charism means to let oneself be invested, penetrated by the *event*.

The role of the leader of the School of Community

The emergence of the School of Community as *event* lies in the responsibility⁶ of the leader. If he proposes the School of Community as the

¹ “It is not helpful to replace the text or the moment of School of Community with something else, with something you’ve made up or imagined. To do so would be an indictment of your inability to understand and do School of Community.”

² “The work of School of Community should not be an exceptional moment but the work of every day.”

³ “Charism is a gift of the Spirit that uses the human (a particular temperament, time, and space) in service of the whole Church. This is one of the central points of the second part of the third volume of *Why the Church*. To realize that the Spirit uses the human is to realize what Catholicism is.”

⁴ As opposed to a proposal of Christianity reduced to the mere repetition of a religious doctrine, moral laws, and worship.

⁵ “a community that fosters a personal comparison between one’s own life and the Movement’s proposal is a source of morality.”

⁶ Responsibility is to respond first: “The School of Community must be felt, experienced, and suffered by the leader. For this reason, the leader is not the “professor” but the first one to seek, to let oneself be questioned, not intellectually but as a judgment. A search that invest all of oneself, that questions life, generates real affection.”

enthusiastic comparison of one's life with the text by being the first to let himself be invested by what he reads⁷, then the School of Community will become a fascinating event that will light up the life of the people. If the leader reduces the School of Community to an intellectual discussion or an excuse to talk about one's own worries or concerns, then the life of the community will not develop. If, instead, the leader overwhelms others with his thoughts, everyone will get used to following their own thoughts rather than allowing the text to judge them.

Comparing one's life with the text is dramatic. A person willing to compare his life with the text must be willing to be corrected, to be judged⁸. Only a person willing to be corrected, willing to be judged, is worth following.

How does School of Community become a point of comparison?

First, the text must be read together attentively aiming to clarify the meaning of the words, to fully understand what is read and to grasp the author's intent. "You must become a disciple of the text, like in the schools of the Middle Ages: reading carefully and precisely, and writing comments in the margins."

Second, it is necessary to exemplify the comparison between what you live and what you've carefully read: how what has been read judges one's own life, what happened the day before, what is happening in the world, and what is happening in one's own circumstances.

School of Community and Mission

The personal *daily*⁹ engagement with the text of School of Community is the privilege way to maintain a systematic relationship with the charism of the Movement. *Presence* in the environment and *mission* are generated from

⁷ "The leader is the source of the School of Community as event in as much as he allows himself to be struck to the point that with discretion and without being sentimental he is the first to humbly say: "I understand that this particular passage judges me."

⁸ "If the text doesn't elicit within us an urgency to change then the text is not helpful to grow."

⁹ "The work of School of Community should not be an exceptional moment but the work of every day."

faithfulness to the charism. It is from faithfulness to the charism that the person grows in the capacity to be a *presence* in his environment.

The School of Community becomes a gesture of *mission*, as opposed to an 'internal seminar', when I perceive that the School of Community is full of promise, full of hope for me as well as for my classmate, coworker, or the person I meet on the street. If it is good for me, why shouldn't be good for them? When we propose the School of Community to other people, we are immediately struck by the existing unity between he and I, we become aware of the shared human thirst for an answer that unites us.

Old words, new meanings

RE: *The Risk of Education*; RS: *The Religious Sense*; PLW: *Is it Possible to live this way?*

[Authority]

Christianity is an event, an “*encounter with someone who is the bearer of an explanatory hypothesis of reality*,” (RE,29) a person who is the embodiment of *tradition: an authority*.

A person is *authority* because he generates a sense of novelty, wonder, and respect. In this person, we find an unavoidable attractiveness (*recognize*) and in us an inevitable subjugation (*adhere*) that invite us to follow and to make ourselves ‘disciples’.” (RE,42)

The educational function of authority is that of helping the person grow. Tradition can only be verified through human experience, one must see it embodied in a person who can offer it as a working hypothesis for the explanation of reality. An authority is a person who embodies the tradition.

Authority is often dumbed down to mechanical obedience or simply denied in favor of upholding autonomy, un-dependence. (RE,31) The avoidance of authority has serious consequences in a person’s development: confusion, uncertainty, impatience, etc.

[Conviction]

Conviction comes from the experience of finding that an idea we have *received* and *embraced* is vitally linked with our deepest elementary needs. Conviction is not about evoking feelings or stirring up pietistic emotion. Conviction is to verify that the involvement with a Christian reality makes life more human, that faith has the capacity to improve and enhance what is authentically human.

To have a *genuine experience of truth*, to be convinced, our whole person must be fully and totally engaged. (RE,47) In order to understand, the person “*must recreate the truth in himself in a living manner. [...] He commits himself and entrusts himself to the ‘way’.*” (RE,6) Conviction is reached only through experience.

[Elementary experience: the heart]

Elementary experience, or heart, is the infallible criterion with which the person evaluates all that he comes across. The criterion to evaluate resides within the person, as it is given with his own nature. Since the criterion is given, it is both objective and infallible.

Giussani describes the elementary experience as a complex of *needs* and *evidences* that can be summarized with different expressions (for example, the need for happiness, the need for truth, justice, etc.). All human action is inconceivable apart from the dynamism sparked by these needs.

[Experience]

Giussani is confident that by engaging with the real intensely, anyone can reach the ultimate meaning of reality. In engaging with the real, a person discovers an impetus to become one with it, to grasp its meaning. Therefore, *experience* is the road towards Mystery and reality is the *locus* of experience. Through experience, the person grows in the ability to *understand* (recognize) and the ability to *love* (adhere).

After Christ, *reality* is no longer the only *locus* of experience. There is also a *supernatural locus*: the Church. The Christian experience has three main elements: An *encounter* with an objective fact that refers to an authority; the *grace of faith* (the power to adequately perceive the meaning of this encounter bestowed gratuitously by God); and the *awareness of the correspondence* between the perceived meaning of the fact encountered and the person’s own existence.

The awareness of the correspondence helps the person realize that he is growing. The person will be aware of the correspondence if he nurtures an acceptance of his basic *dependence*.

[Faith]

Faith is both the *recognition* of an *exceptional presence* that is present and the simple and sincere *adherence* to it. Faith is the “acknowledgment” that God has become present.

That it is an “acknowledgment” means that faith is an act of reason, rather than a feeling or a state of mind. The object of knowledge is Jesus Christ. (PLW,25) To know Him we use the method of faith.

Faith is the most demanding of all methods of reason. Faith requires trusting a witness. Therefore, the person must engage his entire self. (PLW,11) When a person reasons in mathematics, a little wheel in his head goes round. When it deals with things unseen, all the wheels, links, and connections with the body and soul are involved: reason, eyes, heart, everything. The action by which reason knows why to entrust itself to another implies a more complete connection with the other aspects of personality.

Faith requires a personal attitude in order to gather certainty on this process: morality, poverty of spirit. (RS,23-33)

The elements of faith are (PLW,I, 28-40):

- An event that has the form of an ***exceptional encounter***. (If it isn't real, then it cannot be an object of knowledge) “*To be exceptional, an encounter must correspond to what you're waiting for.*” (PLW,31) Exceptional means divine, because the answer to the heart is God.
- The encounter from which John and Andrew's faith began, the encounter that gave them an absolutely exceptional impression, a presentiment of the unimaginable, of the divine, awakened a great

wonder in them, and *dictated a strange question*: “Who can He possibly be?” “Who is this man?”

- The answer to that question is your responsibility. From this point on, “your responsibility begins, you are the one who has to start acting.” This is the answer of faith to which every person can answer yes or no. Like Peter, you can adhere - “If I don’t believe in You, I can’t believe my own eyes” - or go away.

[Feeling]

Feeling’ is the reaction generated by something that happens, something that enters the horizon of a person’s experience. This reaction can be of indifference, sympathy or antipathy, and any other possible nuance.

Contrary to modern thought that either claims that *feelings* prevents reason from acting properly or that *feeling* is the epistemological criterion for truth, Giussani argues that feeling facilitates reason’s task. Therefore, *feeling*’ should not be eliminated but put in its proper place. (RS,24-26)

[Freedom]

Much more than a capacity for choosing, *freedom* is the person’s capacity to *adhere* to what reason perceives as evident. Freedom cannot exist apart from risk, since there is no mechanical adherence to what reason perceives as evident. Adhering always requires that we step outside of ourselves. We are called to “*run the risk of accepting the call and the challenge of [...] the Mystery that invites us to recognize ourselves as made by Him.*” (RE,10)

Freedom is a fundamental part of the act of knowing. “*Freedom is the experience of the truth of ourselves.*” (RS,88)

Faith is the fundamental gesture of *freedom*. “*Faith and prayer are the full recognition of that Presence which is my destiny, and the dependence on this presence is my freedom.*” (RS,88-89)

[Judgment]

To judge is to grasp how the meaning present in something ‘corresponds’ to the original needs of the heart. A judgment of correspondence indicates that the person has become aware that reality is part of the personal dialogue with the Mystery.

[“I”]

In the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, with the intention of clarifying what ‘I’ is and the relationship between the ‘I’, and reality, Giussani proposes a thought experiment: “*Picture yourself being born, coming out of your mother’s womb at the age you are now at this very moment in terms of your development and consciousness. What would be the first, absolutely your initial reaction?*” At that moment, with eyes wide open and divested of preconceptions, you would be “*overpowered by the wonder and awe of things as a ‘presence’*” and amazed by “*the stupefying repercussion of a presence which imposes itself upon me.*” At that moment, if you allow yourself to affirm the attraction, it would be impossible to deny the most profound evidence: “*I do not make myself, I am not making myself. I do not give myself being ... I am ‘given’*” which implies a *giver*, and it indicates a precise way of being in the world: receiving, recognizing, expecting. (RS,100-109)

[Reason]

Reason is “*That energy peculiar to man through which he knows.*” (PLW,20) *Reason* is the ability to become aware of reality as a whole, in the totality of its factors, noting its connections and implications, seeking to grasp its meaning. (RS,12-22)

The apex of *reason* is the recognition of the existence of an ultimate, mysterious level of reality, and the acknowledgment that things proceed from Another. In this sense, reason anticipates the revelation of Mystery.

Reason cannot come to know the Mystery on its own. The Mystery makes Himself known only when He reveals himself, taking the initiative to place Himself as a factor in human experience when and as He wills.

Reason uses multiple methods for observing and coming to know an object. Each method is prescribed by the object of knowledge. Faith is one of those methods. Faith is an indirect way of knowing since it is mediated: “reason doesn’t see the object directly. It comes to know about the object through a witness.” (PLW,20)

The modern mindset reduces reason to a group of categories in which reality is forced to find a place. This mentality, as a consequence, defines whatever does not fall within those categories as irrational.

[Truth]

Truth is the person of Jesus Christ: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*” Truth is not an idea. Our interest is to know *truth in me*, not merely to worship Him. In defining the act of knowing *truth*, Thomas Aquinas states: *adequatio rei et intellectus*. The truth is a correspondence (*adequatio*) between the object (*rei*) and our self-awareness (*intellectus*); our awareness of ourselves – that is, the awareness of the needs that make up our heart. If God is the truth (God *corresponds* to my heart), then I can say with Paul: “*It is not I but Christ that lives in me.*” (Gal 2:20). Therefore, to know *truth*, is to know Him. To say that I know to be *true* means that I’m convinced through experience.

[Verification]

The verification of the tradition is personal. Authority and community can never replace the required personal engagement needed in order to verify a tradition, but, instead, energize the freedom of the person so that she might overcome fear and go beyond the abyss of the ‘buts’ and ‘what ifs’.

The field of verification of the *tradition* is the *environment*, the entire reality. (RE,52) The verification must be done in a communal way, since

community is an interior dimension (*dependence*) of every person, at the origin of our thoughts and our actions. (RE,54) Community is at the core of the understanding of the person as ontologically dependent on another.

Community is the condition for the affirmation of the person's freedom. By belonging to it, we can take up the journey "*explicitly running the risk of accepting the call of the mystery that invites us to recognize ourselves as made by Him.*" (RE,28)

The insistence that verification must be done within a shared essential living doesn't mean that the verification is not a personal endeavor. Conviction arises only from the process of personal verification. Unfortunately, our common mindset aims to avoid *risk* at all costs, to shelter people from the shock (traditionalism) as a way of protecting oneself and those we love. This attitude stops the development of a Christian personality by denying the possibility of a work of verification (RE,63). The lack of a personal full engagement (*risk*) with a proposal put forth by an authority blocks true religious experience.

To avoid the temptation to reduce the journey to truth to willpower or moralism (must behave as tradition says), that is to 'duty', Giussani highlights the critical importance of free time: the space in which people most transparently choose for themselves and therefore can collect evidence in their personal journey to conviction. Free time is the space of free adherence. The transition space from 'duty' to 'fascination' (RE,56). Giussani warns against any form of demanding impatience on the part of adults (parents or educators) that take away from the person an increasing responsibility to adhere, to choose, to risk (RE,61).

[Work]

The person's original experience reveals that the self and reality are united in their *givenness*. This "unity" can be *perfected* in many ways such as knowing

and loving reality. Becoming one with reality comes about by means of a “project,” that is, through work.

The relation between the person and the mystery not only includes the task of becoming aware of what things are and affirming them in their existence but also elicits in the person the desire to bring reality closer to its fulfillment by transforming it. In this sense, to “experience” is to transform reality with the memory of its *being given* while affirming its ultimate meaning, its destiny.

A Brief Biography

Luigi Giussani was born on October 15, 1922, in Desio, a small town north of Milan, Italy. He entered the seminary of Venegono at the age of eleven and was ordained a priest on May 26, 1945, by Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster. After his priestly ordination, his superiors decided the young Giussani should stay at the seminary to continue his studies. After completing his dissertation in 1954, Giussani asked his superiors to teach Religion in a public high school. He taught at Liceo Berchet, a high school with a focus on the classics in Milan, until 1967.

The content of his lessons were the themes that would accompany him, as part of a lifelong, ever-deepening study, along his entire arc of his life as a man and an educator: the religious sense and the reasonableness of faith, the hypothesis and reality of Revelation, the pedagogy Christ uses in revealing Himself, the nature of the Church as the continuity of Christ's presence in history up to the present. His presence in the school gave new energy to Gioventù Studentesca (GS or "Student Youth" – the name for the activities of Catholic Action in high schools) and gave it the contours of a true Movement. So began the history of Communion and Liberation.

Beginning in the 1964 school year, Giussani taught "Introduction to Theology" at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, a position that he would hold until 1990. An organic synthesis of his course was published in the form of the three-volume "PerCorso" ("itinerary") series: *The Religious Sense*, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, and *Why the Church*. *The Religious Sense* especially would enjoy enduring success; it is currently translated into 23 languages and has been presented throughout the world.

In 1968, GS was overtaken by the political upheavals of the time, and many of its members joined the movements of protesting students, abandoning the Christian life. During that same year, Giussani laid the groundwork for

a recovery of the experience at the origin of the Movement. The name “Communion and Liberation” was adopted the following year.

In the early 1970s, Giussani became directly involved with a group of students at the Catholic University of Milan which became the seed for the expansion of the Movement into every realm of life: high schools, universities, in parishes, in factories and in the workplace, often successfully challenging mindsets that were politically or culturally hostile to theirs. Giussani did not shy away from the risks of such turbulent growth and untiringly called members back to the “true nature” of CL as an experience of maturity in the faith, continually pointing out the “consequences” of this at the intellectual, organizational and political levels.

As the years passed, Giussani’s early intuitions regarding mission and ecumenism continued to develop. Some GS students moved to Brazil as early as the beginning of the 1970s. At the same time, in part through his friendship with Fr. Romano Scalfi and his organization Russia Cristiana (an association formed to raise awareness about the rich tradition of Russian Orthodoxy), his ties to Eastern Europe and the orthodox world multiplied. Over the course of these years, the Movement continued to grow – primarily in Europe, Latin America and the United States – in part in response to the warm encouragement of John Paul II in 1984 to “go into all the world.”

The beginning of the 1990s brought the appearance of the first signs of the illness that would accompany him for over a decade, increasing in severity up until his death. It was also during these years Giussani presented a number of his most enduring meditations to the Movement: “Riconoscere Cristo” [“Recognizing Christ”], *Il Tempo e il Tempio* [Time and the Temple], and *È, Se Opera* [He Is, if He Is At Work], all expressions of an extraordinary season of creativity focused on the themes of the Christian event and the mystery of God. [Il Tempo e Il Tempio]. It was an intensely prolific period, despite his advancing illness. Two of the texts that are fundamental in understanding his conception of Christianity were

published: *Si può vivere così?* [Is it Possible to Live This Way?] and *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo* [Generating Traces in the History of the World].

On February 22, 2005, he died in his home in Milan. The funeral Mass was celebrated in the Duomo in Milan by then-Cardinal and Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Joseph Ratzinger, serving as the personal representative of John Paul II. He was buried in the Monumentale Cemetery in Milan. His tomb has become the destination for a steady stream of pilgrimages from Italy and around the world.

At the end of the Mass celebrated at the Duomo in Milan on the seventh anniversary of Fr. Giussani's death, on February 22, 2012, Fr. Carrón announced that the request to open the cause for canonization of Giussani had been accepted by Cardinal Angelo Scola, Archbishop of Milan.

What is CL?

Communion and Liberation is a companionship, a *friendship*, which strives to share in all aspects and needs of life. CL's chief concern is to share the convenience and beauty of Christian living, a witness we see as the most essential contribution to our fellow men and women. The name, "Communion and Liberation" succinctly defines the modality with which we are present in the world: our identity is given by our experience of faith lived in communion, which we believe is the true liberation of man.

In 2004, Fr. Giussani wrote to John Paul II: "I believe that the genius of the Movement that I saw coming to light lies in having felt the urgency to proclaim the need to return to the elementary aspects of Christianity, that is to say, the passion of the Christian fact as such in its original elements, and nothing more. Perhaps it was precisely this that awoke the unforeseeable possibility of encounter with personalities of the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Protestant and Orthodox worlds, from the United States to Russia, in an impetus of embrace and appreciation of all that remains of truth, of beauty, of good and of right in whoever lives a sense of belonging."

The community life of CL is marked by simplicity and freedom. Communities, whether large or small, are formed spontaneously at school, at work, in their neighborhood. No official membership cards or formal registration is necessary. Anyone is welcome to join.

There are three gestures at the center of community life: **School of Community**, which is the primary instrument for the "education" of those who adhere to the life of the community. School of Community consists of reading and personal meditation on a text, followed by a communal meeting in a public place or in a member's home. Through the School of Community, a person is educated to continuously compare the Christian proposal with his own life experience, in order to continually verify the

capacity of Christianity to respond to each human need and to illuminate every aspect of reality. The second gesture is **Charitable Work**. This is a monthly commitment to serve those in need, which has as its goal the education to the most important “law” of existence: charity. The third is the **Common Fund**, a financial contribution to sustain the community’s charitable, missionary and cultural initiatives. Each person is encouraged to faithfully give a fixed amount (decided independently and privately) each month.

The awareness that faith is not something “apart from” concrete daily responsibilities, choices, and endeavors, but inherent in and, therefore, pertinent to all of these, motivates many members of the Movement to dedicate themselves freely to the creation of initiatives, organizations, and associations in a wide variety of fields, which have in some cases reached a scale to attract national or international attention such as the New York Encounter or the Rimini Meeting. Another example is AVSI, a nonprofit organization involved in crisis response and human development work in over 30 countries around the world. All of the charitable and educational organizations born from the Movement would be too many to list, from rehabilitation communities for those who struggle with addiction and communities to help educate and reintegrate at-risk youth, to cooperatives that provide work for those in prison, to the many schools present in Italy and in many other countries, schools which often collaborate with those who are not in CL).

All of these initiatives are the fruit of the free and independent initiative of members and their own personal responsibility. The Movement plays no role in the leadership or management of the organizations created by members of CL, with one exception: the Fondazione Sacro Cuore (Sacred Heart Foundation) in Milan, a K-12 school created at Fr. Giussani’s request.

Currently, CL is present in about 90 countries on almost every continent. Fr. Giussani passed away in 2005, after which Fr. Julián Carrón took over

the leadership of the Movement, having been selected by the founder as his successor.