

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón**  
**Milan, June 8, 2011**

*Reference text: "Whoever Is in Christ Is a New Creation," Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation 2011, supplement to Traces no. 5 (2011)*

*Song: "Luntane, cchiu` luntane"*

*Song: "Lela"*

*Glory Be*

The work we had assigned ourselves for today was once again the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises.

*I wanted to ask for your help because, going back to two Schools of Community ago, I have a pebble in my shoe that I cannot get rid of. It is the last letter you read that contained a passage where either the person left something out or, if it is as you said when you went back to it in the end, there's something I don't know yet but that I want to know, because I think that if I knew it, it could help me to get unstuck in many situations. I also talked with friends, asked for clarifications, but I feel I didn't get anywhere. I am going to read a small part of the letter, if I may. The letter tells about a discomfort, a difficulty in facing a string of circumstances, and at one point it says this: "Then I remembered the promise I made to you: I will never say anything without looking at myself in action first. I observed myself the whole day, trying to understand what moved me, why I was doing things: lunch with that friend, studying in a certain way... In all my actions there was a common denominator: a constant search for something that would fulfill my longing. About me, about life, I only have one certainty: that my heart is full of longing, is full of expectation, of tension, is full of the promise that life is not empty, that I am looking for something that exists – otherwise I would stop looking. My heart is searching, so it affirms Another with a constant certainty [this is the point]. Suddenly, without any calculation, without any formula or any reasoning, that "You" came back. By breaking in, He overcame me, He assailed me, He involved me and He embraced me. It was this You and I, and nothing else. And I started to breathe again: a relationship so intimate and tender as to leave one speechless." I was struck by this because, either she left out something, or, if it is truly as she said it, it means that she did not need (at least as I see it) either something outside herself, a fact, something that happened, or to read something, or to live the memory of something else. Because when I get stuck, I don't have this resource. I was surprised by the fact that you said twice that this is a point of no return. I am interested in a point of no return, because I always thought that when one gets stuck, either he lives the memory of a fact or he wishes for what happened to happen again, and so becomes driven by the attempt to discover it, looking at reality with curiosity, searching for it, wherever it may be. What I have a hard time understanding is such an intimate relationship with this You: it seems to appear by magic. Maybe I am experiencing it subconsciously, I don't know, but I want a point of no return, because I know that it can accompany me forever.*

This is the heart of the matter of the first lesson; it is the difficulty we constantly experience. This is why I don't want to answer this question now at the beginning of our School of Community. I want to see if there is somebody who has something to say on this passage. Because about this letter he says, "It's as if a You suddenly appeared [which is what often

happens to us, too], a You that one pulls out of his sleeve, as if he were inventing it. That is, it's like at some point we were creators instead of witnesses. So, is something missing in the passages of the letter, or not?

I want you to put aside all the witnesses you had prepared. Now we are going to respond to what just came up, because here, we stay in front of what is happening now. Let's go!

*I wanted to thank you, and at the same time I thank the Movement, because when you dealt with the second point at the Exercises, "The eternal mystery of our being," I was deeply struck. In fact, it made me recognize the point of awareness that constitutes me and that is revealed in action and in the impact with reality, when I experience a deep longing for this You, also in a very painful way. However, while on other occasions I lived it by reducing it to an intimistic and psychological fact...*

And why isn't it an intimistic and psychological fact?

*I know that what you said created more certainty in me, the certainty of the bond created by the relationship with the Presence. This is how I saw that in the certainty of a heart that is vibrating for Him, involvement with everything grows even deeper, goes to the core. For example, in me it created an even greater cultural interest in the research I am doing, making me attentive to look for everything that can become part of the tension that carries me through my work.*

Thank you.

*When you read that letter I had the same question: How can I trust something that happens inside of me? And this revealed a stance I also discovered inside of me when I heard what you said on other occasions.*

Repeat the question you asked...

*How can I trust something that happens inside of me? It seems so fragile. Then I looked at these past few weeks, and this is what happened to me. I went to hand out flyers and I invited some high school kids. After two days a kid I have some difficulties with came to me; as always I tried to avoid him, but instead he asked me, "I had an experience when I went to hand out flyers. On the one hand I was excited, happy, because I discovered that I had something to say, but at the same time I had an experience of, let's say, being small." When he said this I stopped; I looked at him and said, "Well, this is the same experience I had." I realized that I felt free in my relationship with him. In that instant I understood that something was happening inside of me; the experience of freedom was the way I understood what you had said with the letter, because Christ is something that was happening to me in the form of this experience of freedom. So I said, "But that means I can trust, because Someone else is dwelling in my life."*

But in the letter she doesn't mention this.

*No, I am saying...*

Don't think you can get away with it so easily.

*No, no.*

Don't add whatever comes to your mind; just respond to it.

*I am talking about freedom.*

Afterwards we will get where you want to get, too.

*Yes, yes, but I am saying that this was the discovery I made in time because of a freedom that was happening in me, not created by me. I experience what she calls "You" because of something that happens in me in the form of something mysterious in which I discover, I discovered myself...*

Where does she experience this?

*Ah, she?*

Yes, in what she says.

*That she could not exhaust it... The longing she discovered, that desire she discovered in herself in everything she was doing, was something different from herself.*

Why?

*Because she couldn't fulfill that desire; she was working to find an answer to it.*

Do you all agree? Thank you.

I see that today the line has gotten short very quickly. As a professor of mine used to say, good toreadors are made by facing good bulls (but I see that here this toreador experience is missing...). I am thankful that the first witness raised this question, because it identifies a real difficulty we have; even if we read the fifth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, which is the backbone of the first lesson on Saturday morning, we can see the difficulty we have exactly because when faced with a letter like the one just quoted, we don't understand. But everything Father Giussani says in that chapter, he says it starting from sadness, from solitude, from expectation, from longing! And what does all this entail for him? As he says very clearly at the end, in the conclusion, the fact that all these factors exist, the fact that the question is present is the most evident sign that the answer exists: "The very existence of the question implies the existence of an answer" (*The Religious Sense*, page 58). This passage is almost incomprehensible for us. Why? Where do we see it? Because it's like as soon as a person has described all the longing, all the expectation, all the tension, all the promise, when one says, "You," it seems he pulled it out of a hat, like a rabbit – indeed, by magic. That is, we don't see the relationship between all these facts that we cannot erase from our life and the affirmation of the You. Because of this, in the end, we often think that the You is affirmed because we decide to, and not because it comes out from the depth of the real experience we had; this is why we think that we invented it. Why do I feel the need to say, "You"? Why am I certain as I say, "You"? Why am I sure that the "You" exists? Since we don't solve the problem at this level, how many times in the past few years have we asked each other, "Why do I have to say Christ when facing things that happened? Why do I have to say...?" The problem is the same, applied to faith. What happens, my friends? What is the difference between Father Giussani's attitude or the letter's, and ours? That we take the desire for granted, we take the presence of longing for granted; we take the experience of solitude for granted. What does it mean to take for granted? That for us to experience sadness and solitude doesn't imply anything else. Instead, if you read all that Father Giussani says in the fifth chapter, each time he speaks of these things he implies something else. He cannot speak about sadness without recognizing that it is the desire for an absent good; he cannot speak about solitude without the solitude becoming, when one looks at it truly, the opportunity to rediscover the original companionship; he cannot speak about longing because there couldn't be any longing without a You. This is why, when a person writes a letter like the one we reread, we think that something was left out. This is why I spent some time on the question of longing, which is where we can observe it more clearly. Why does Lagerkvist (quoted by Father Giussani at the end of the chapter) speak about longing? Why is it that when someone looks at the phenomenon of longing in himself he cannot help but imply a you he is longing for? Because the fact that there is longing is the clearest sign, the most evident proof that I am not inventing a you, because nobody who suffers from longing is inventing a you; the person who doesn't have a you doesn't experience longing! The fact that we become aware of

this longing is the most evident proof that there is a you, not because I decide it, not because I affirm it, not because I give rise to it, not because I create it (add all the verbs you want), but because there is a you! Because there is a you! It isn't intimistic or psychological, because to affirm the phenomenon of longing something needs to exist outside me to provoke this longing, and something needs to exist inside me, like this structure that I cannot explain without the You whom I long for. Here we experience our rationalism first-hand, that is, this way of using reason that Father Giussani constantly tries to help us to give up, by quoting the human experiences of the "most human" human beings, from Dostoevsky to Leopardi to Pavese. Why? Because at the apex of the human experience a person doesn't add his own fantasies, but realizes what is implied in the dynamism of his own "I." What we take for granted is this very dynamism, this dynamic of the "I." And if the companionship that is original to our "I" is missing, then we can be in the midst of many people but still feel alone, because companionship cannot be anything but the You. It is there, in the moment of solitude, says Father Giussani, where one discovers his original companionship. If we don't stop and think of this we will keep using reason in a rationalistic way, that is, as measure. Then when we get to the point, we affirm the You without an adequate reason, and we are not certain. What shows us this? The fact that it is an assumption and not knowledge. Likewise, tomorrow it will happen with Christ, because it is this same way of using reason that leaves us constantly uncertain. In this sense the consequence of the path Father Giussani proposes to us is extraordinary, because it is the fiercest struggle against the reduction of reason to measure that makes the affirmation of the You seem like something pasted on (as you always tell me), extra, something that is not part of the experience itself. Instead, he calmly says that the answer exists because of the very fact that there is the question. This letter brings our difficulty out in the open, because we don't have the courage to tell Father Giussani that he is leaving something out, but you can address the same objection you make to our friend in the letter, or to me, directly to Father Giussani, directly! Here we clearly see how we can repeat the fifth chapter of *The Religious Sense* for years and not budge an inch from our position. We read it, but it doesn't affect us; it doesn't affect us. Do you understand now the fierce struggle of the Pope to broaden reason? It's not a problem about God; it's not a problem about the You: it is, again, a problem of the "I," of the ability of the "I" in affirming the You. This is why the Church has always defended, amid this creeping rationalism, ever since Vatican I, the capacity of reason to affirm the You, to affirm the Mystery. If this is not true, what doesn't hold is not this chapter, is not the entire book, but the whole Journey (the PerCorso, the Trilogy). If I exist, what is the most evident thing? That there is a You. But this is not an intimistic or psychological problem, because I exist in reality and I have to give an adequate reason, in every instant that I am living, of why I exist. This is what we take for granted, but it is the last thing to be taken for granted! Because we take it for granted, we don't understand that the fact that it cannot be taken for granted already implies that there is Someone who is giving it to me in this at very moment: I am You who make me, now. Not because I am thinking of it, not because I am feeling it, not because I am imagining it, not because I am creating it: because I exist! It isn't a psychological problem; it isn't a problem of making projections like with Feuerbach: it is a problem implied by the very fact that I exist. Kids, and "less" kids, this is crucial because all our troubles, all our fears, all our uncertainties originate from here, because we can't stay true to anything if we do this. And this is how it is, not because I am saying so, but because this is how it is, period. It's not a problem of numbers, a problem of consensus. No! No, even if I were the only one affirming it, the only one aware of it, and you were all distracted, it would be equally true that in this moment I am not making myself. If a person doesn't come to this, to this

certainty in the use of reason, that is, to a way of living the “I” which encompasses its entire nature as “I,” we will always feel that affirming the You is like a leap in the dark (which is the image many have of faith). This is why I ask you to go deeper into this point, because in the letters you send it’s clear: “In spite of my experience at the Exercises and in Rome, although in the last few months and years I have seen so many witnesses, and facts that have really made my daily life more glad, in spite of the avalanche of friends that have come unexpectedly, a husband, three children, a job, in spite of all this, ever since I came back from Rome a big sadness torments my heart. This is why last School of Community seemed to be exactly all for me, beginning with the song. Nothing, really nothing, apart from a few brief moments when I try not to think, takes this sadness away from me. Sometimes I’ve wondered, even right there in front of you, “What are we talking about? [Good for you, finally: But what are we talking about?] Yet I know very well what we are talking about, or better, Who are we talking about. But it’s like, after all, I thought that yes, Christ exists, He loves me, I have seen Him, He has embraced me, and yet I’m like the rich young man, and I go away sad. I’ll tell you that last Friday I started to understand this a little bit more by reading the fifth chapter of *The Religious Sense*. I began to understand at least that I was not alone. Questions about life, about my life (Why was I born? Why am I here now? What is reality made of? What about the mountains, the sky, my friends, my children, me?), questions so well described there, are my questions. But this means that the encounter with Christ causes the religious sense to grow by leaps and bounds. [If this happens by looking at sadness, imagine what happens in your meeting with Christ Who reawakens the question even more! The bigger the question, the more intense the question, the more it takes hold of me, the harder it is to give an explanation, all the more evident it is that there is something else: the encounter with Christ makes what the fifth chapter says more obvious.] I have always thought [this is our problem] that by encountering the answer, I would finally be okay. But instead, nothing has closure; the wound I have inside won’t close. What is happening to me? Have I gone back to the starting point? Have I gone backwards? Everything seems to bring such little satisfaction. My heart has been rapidly expanding lately, due to the need for meaning that I have.” But what is this need for meaning, which is still expanding inside of me, a sign of? This intense way of living, the longing I didn’t have before, which comes out when I encounter someone, and which is infinitely bigger than when I was asleep, is this a sign that I have gone backwards, or that the more that that Person appears, the clearer it becomes how much the event has reawakened my whole being? This is the confirmation that there is something real and present that constantly reawakens me. So in light of all this, the letter says, “A sentence keeps coming to my mind that you have often said: ‘It’s a problem of knowledge.’ It’s a problem of knowledge, I tell myself; and so last night I went out alone for a ride in my car, to cry all by myself. When I came around a turn (I live in the hills), I was presented with a beautiful vista. I stopped the car. There, looking at that sunset, I couldn’t help but ask the Mystery to answer me. I could no longer object [and not because she was unaware of her disproportion]. There I felt all the disproportion between me and Him. All of my claims collapsed, and I could do nothing but beg.” Someone else says, “I listened to the School of Community of last Wednesday. You were reading a few letters. I understood that the writers were describing a human path of discovery of Christ’s presence, as something certain, able to be enjoyed, able to be lived. These people were not silly geese, but people who live in a dramatic way, not without challenges, but with a humanity that I initially envied. I have received the grace of meeting Christ in my life, because I have met the gladness that was described last night. Then, however, this same Christ seemed to fade away, perhaps rightly so. I have been left with a huge desire for Him.” Can you see how

these two things go together? “Christ seemed to fade away, and I was left with a huge desire for Him.” But isn’t the desire for Him the clearest proof that He has not faded away? Does longing occur because He has faded away, or because He is? Father Giussani says this very clearly on page 56 of *The Religious Sense* (We already quoted it at the Exercises): “Therefore, before solitude there is companionship, which embraces my solitude. For this reason, solitude is no longer true solitude, but crying out for that hidden companionship.” And since we can’t understand this, we come to the point of saying, at the same time, that we have this huge desire for Him, and that He has faded away. But what does Giussani say in the whole chapter? Precisely this: that He has not faded away, that this is the clearest sign that He is there! Is he making this up? Is Giussani a visionary, too? Are all those he quotes visionaries? Are we the only ones who are realists? Or are they the ones who are truly men, and we, instead, are reduced by power? Each one of us can decide, but this means that there is still a long way to go. Fortunately, the letter goes on, saying, “By listening to the letters you were reading and through that envy, my desire was bigger than ever. I felt that that companionship I was waiting for was actually happening [But it was happening not only because of the letters: the letters were making him aware of what was happening in his desire, too, but he is not aware of it there], and so I understood what we were saying afterwards. After a few lines, I found myself already making plans. [Do you see?] As I was saying, for something like this I need to give everything. Deep down, though, sadness prevailed because, after all, I never withdrew myself from anything and, in spite of this, I have never been able to possess the Christ Whom I desire as a friend. I was assailed by a sweet perception of powerlessness because everything I desire is not in my hands. I don’t own the Beloved. As I was exhausted in this way, I found myself repeating, ‘Come, O Christ.’ I have never been that used to praying before [because one is used to praying only when prayer comes from within the heart of the “I,” whereas for us it is often a devout, pious thing] especially to prayer made with the often repetitive words that the Church suggests. Instead, in the last few days I feel that prayer [Look what we discover when we don’t skip anything: words reacquire a meaning from within experience] was the most intelligent thing to do [not something for the pious and the devout, but for someone who becomes aware of what he is and what reality is, that is, for the most intelligent and not the stupidest], the most constructive, and it’s no longer a burden. If this is called ‘new life,’ now I know what it is about: no longer just words, but an experience. So I understand what it means to ask Christ, ‘Teach us how to pray.’ He led me to it not with an elaborate essay, but through the urgency of an experience [which is the end of the lesson: toward You, Christ, I turn all my desire]; and I also understand the Pope’s words at the audience of last May 11: ‘In the dynamics of this relationship with the One Who gives a meaning to existence, with God, prayer has one of its typical expressions in one’s gesture to get down on one’s knees.’ I can spontaneously kneel, confessing my limitations, and so my need for Someone else. This chapter is all yet to be discovered.”

The next School of Community will take place on Wednesday, June 22, at 9:30 p.m. We’ll take up the second lesson again. This doesn’t mean that we are done with the first one, because there is still a lot to be learned.

We have prepared a flier signed by Communion and Liberation about the recent elections in Italy. I will now read it:

***Ready to Give Reason for the Hope within Us***

*Like any other life circumstance, the recent administrative elections have forced each one of us to take a position and to assume our own responsibility. This time in particular, it was not easy to go beyond appearances and the commonplaces fueled by politicians and by the dominant opinion.*

*From the beginning we said, “We are Christians, and so, before any electoral calculation, and before we find out the final outcome, **we want to verify whether faith has something to say** even on this occasion – in other words, if it has a historical impact – or whether it has to give up the game, resigning itself to playing the role of courtesan for whoever will capture power or of comforter for the defeated.”*

*Many have accepted the challenge, and have embarked upon a process of verification in concrete ways, by meeting people at the market, in front of churches, in condominiums, and at work and at school. And what have we seen? A common as well as confused desire for change, but also a great deal of skepticism, and not only at political level; at times, an open and exaggerated aggressiveness; and most of all, an ocean of need and solitude. Whenever it was possible to penetrate the wall of prejudice and hostility, there was found a mountain of wounded humanity that had been tested by life. So many people seemed to be waiting for nothing more than someone willing just to stay with them!*

*Thus, these elections became the opportunity to listen, to become aware of needs and unimaginable dramas, sometimes to hold out our hands and offer help. In a few cases an exchange of phone numbers was all it took to reawaken desire and hope.*

***What made all this possible?** Certainly not political shrewdness and speechifying. Much more is needed to cut through the crust that many surround themselves with in order to defend themselves from a reality that does not satisfy. Now, in front of such deep need, the temptation of utopia can resurface: the dream that politics of any stripe or fashion can offer a magic solution to eliminate pain, evil, injustice, to free and save man. However, we are well aware how disappointing it can be to hope in something as inconsistent as a utopia, which history has invariably disproved. Thus we began to repeat to one another, “Let’s not expect a miracle, but a journey.” This is why we have shared with everyone the only real thing that we have: an experience of a new humanity that has proven to be capable of giving us fulfillment and positivity, no matter what circumstances we are in.*

*After these elections, the words that Father Giussani said to a young man he met at the Catholic University of Milan at the end of the 70’s seem very fresh. This young man, at the time, saw revolution as the only way to impact history. Father Giussani said, “**The forces that move history are the same ones that make man happy.** The force that makes history is a man who has set up His dwelling among us: Christ. The rediscovery of this fact prevents our distraction as men. Recognizing it introduces our life to happiness, no matter how intimidated and full of unavoidable reticence. It is by going deep into these things that a man begins to touch his shoulders in the morning and feel his body as more consistent. He begins to look at himself in the mirror and feel his face as more consistent, to feel his ‘I’ as more consistent, and his journey among men as more consistent. He does not depend on how other people look at him. He is free. He is not dependent on the reactions of others. He is free. He is not a victim of others’ logic of power. He is free.”*

*These elections have prodded us to a greater awareness of what are “the forces that move history,” and to be less naïve about the saving power of politics. **Only faith makes our present life more human:** it begins a vibration in the face of our need and others’*

*need; it raises a passion for the destiny of every individual person we meet; it opens up a possibility for dialogue with indifferent, disappointed, or even angry people.*

***And what now? We desire nothing other than freedom** – for us and for all – to build and share our experience with anyone, beginning with those we met in these last few months, beginning with their needs. Will politicians, both the winners and the losers, be able to recognize this new life in the present moment and defend it as something good for all?*

*When we were born as a movement, we asked only one thing of those in power at that time: “You can make us walk around naked, but allow us the freedom to educate.” Then, just as now, Communion and Liberation exists only for this purpose. **Are we asking too much?***

Understanding this is the only way for what we have experienced to help us take a step forward in our awareness because, as Father Giussani used to tell us all the time, “There is no true experience if it doesn’t help us grow in the awareness of what we have experienced.” This is why the judgment in the leaflet is an opportunity to not lose the experience of what has recently happened to us or of what we have seen happening. It’s important, especially for us, because we become more aware of our experience and of the origin of our historical impact, and to offer the people we have met during the campaign the opportunity to continue an exchange, a dialogue, and to offer assistance. Many of you have told me about people who, after the elections, have sought you out. We need to continue the dialogue that we have begun, because the game is not finished. For many, it has just begun. This is why it’s an opportunity to continue the dialogue.

We propose a few books for the summer.

The first is the book by the Pope, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*.

The fact that we chose a passage from it for the Easter poster has given you a chance to see the importance of this book. This is why, in order to gain familiarity with Christ, a deeper knowledge of Him, a book like this is not to be missed.

To help us with this, a booklet will be attached to the July issue of *Traces* with the transcript of a talk given by Ignacio Carbajosa for the presentation of the book by the Pope in Madrid. This will also be useful for the public presentations of the book put on by the Cultural Centers in various cities.

The second book is *Ciò che abbiamo di più caro* [*What We Hold Most Dear*] by Father Giussani. It is a collection of material from the équipes of CLU from 1988 and 1989. As I have already mentioned, it is providential to see how Father Giussani, through these texts, walks with us on this journey regarding exactly what we are living now.

The third book is *Brand* by Ibsen, the drama of a Protestant pastor who has sacrificed his life to achieve the ethical ideal, moral perfection through human will. It is very interesting to read it in view of the chapter we talked about today. *Brand* is an example of what we sometimes think: that we can make it with our own efforts. This is a problem of knowledge: since we have not understood the nature of the “I,” we keep putting our hope in what we are able to do. In this book you will see what this entails, and what kind of despair it causes. Father Giussani commented, “The most incisive image of this despair about one’s own ethical powerlessness is in the last scene when the protagonist, who has been looking for consistency all of his life, cries out when

faced with death, ‘Tell me, God, in death’s abyss/ is no fleck of hoped-for bliss/ earned by man’s will?’”

Finally, the novel *Lord of the World* by Robert Hugh Benson, where we see how power tends to make us lose our self-awareness.

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*