

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, November 9, 2011**

Reference text: The Religious Sense, chapter XI, pp. 110-119.

Song: "Il viaggio"

Song: "Ojos de cielo"

What we just sang tonight is precisely what we should learn. "You listened to all of us speak, then You spoke about Yourself, of that world far, far away, yet true. Then I fell into the trap of hate and power," and he starts the journey: "The rising sun found me on the road running after all the time I had wasted. I have crossed mountains and seas, and now I want to continue my journey with you. I am looking for you in every house, I am speaking of you to everyone I meet, and that far, far away world is now [now!] ever more true." This is the point: whether the world is getting less and less true as we walk along this road, or whether reality, the road, makes it truer and truer.

I went to the funeral of Giovanni, the university student who died in a road accident last Friday, here in Milan. He was studying Veterinary Medicine. Each time I celebrate or attend a funeral of a young person I am moved as I think of their parents, who can remember the moments spent with their children, and I tell myself: what a trial, what a sorrow! How can a person endure something like this and not lose his mind? The only thing I could say was, "Lord, embrace them; only being certain of your Presence can sustain them." Then the mother told us about your phone call, when you told her to be certain that the good Giovanni is receiving now is greater than the good she was able to give him as his mother. I thought, "It is really like that." However, as we read the tenth, and especially the eleventh chapter of The Religious Sense, we see that Fr. Giussani says that the very need of the heart is in itself proof that there is an answer. So, I was thinking of that mother; the fact that she had her son for twenty two years and the fact that she has the need and the desire for her son to be alive are already proof that the answer exists. But I am asking, "Is it possible for a human being – a father, a mother – to endure something like this without Christ? Is it possible to affirm this as a titanic effort of reason without Him, without being embraced?"

This is a crucial question, and you wrote to me about this, because we all feel the urgency of such a question. Can reason alone sustain us in front of life's contradictions? We have to keep this question open, and I hope that by the end of School of Community, through the work we will do, we will be able to answer it. Everybody or at least many were struck by the last School of Community, when I made a strong statement, "This isn't a problem of faith, but a problem of reason."

Last time at the end you said, "Everything there is, because it has happened, because the Mystery has allowed it to happen – since everything has its origin in that You –, for the fact that it has happened, is a provocation for our life, i.e. an invitation to change, it's an occasion for taking a step towards destiny, it's for us, it's the way, it's an instrument of our journey, it's a sign. Let's say it: reality is sign. This is reality's ultimate nature. This crisis puts in front of everyone this challenge, in front of us and the others, because the

challenge is for everyone.” Later on, last Friday in Assago you said, “The positivity is revealed only to those who take up this challenge.” These lines opened up for me a world that before I was not looking at in this way and that now I am beginning to look at. I was aware of the fact that the positivity of reality doesn’t coincide with what is pleasant or desirable; however, now you are introducing us to something new for me, really new. I have many examples; the latest one I wanted to tell you about has to do with meeting a girl a friend brought to my attention because she had lost her job; she had just graduated and she told me that she failed her junior year in high school. I answered with a platitude, “Well, you see, it isn’t one of the biggest problems in life.” She answered, “No, I was saved by this failure!” I was taken aback, because for a kid in high school being left back (you are a junior and you have to go back, your schoolmates go on) is an obstacle, an unpleasant circumstance – definitely not as dramatic as the circumstance we just heard, but in any case not desirable - and she is saying to me, very calmly, that this is what saved her. She didn’t want to go back to that school, but she did because her mother insisted, and she met some new schoolmates, an environment that opened her wide. Then she told me, “Before being left back, during my junior year I was not involved with life, and from that moment on all circumstances I found myself in [from then on], good or bad, just kept opening me up more, they made me become more alive.” Here comes the heart of the matter: what is positive? This is something objective: not something that has to be pleasant, but something that brings me to know evermore something of myself and of the Mystery, of the reason for which I exist.

We will go back to this later.

This fact happened to me. A month ago some friends from Romagna came to dinner at our house with some other families. Among these families there were the parents of that child mentioned in the October issue of Traces. The child wasn’t even supposed to be born due to a serious malformation, and not only he was born, but he is now almost five months old. A few days ago a friend who had come to that dinner at our home sent me a message telling me what had happened to her the day before, i.e. that two married friends of hers had called her and her husband with great urgency, making it seem very serious; in short, the world had come to an end for them because they were expecting their fourth child: financial difficulties, age, other problems. This friend wrote to me saying, “I had to choose. I could have given the usual correct speech about how to face this situation, and instead I chose to tell them about the repercussion I had experienced in meeting those parents, and I invited them to read the article in Traces. A few days later these friends called me again and I went to see them; I found them completely different from three days earlier, there was an opening that wasn’t there three days before; a crack had opened in their usual way of looking at reality (and also at this new pregnancy).” I asked myself, ‘what does it mean that this illness, the drama of these parents regarding the diagnosis of their son is positive? Because they introduced a challenge, a newness in me and in their friends that arrived as by word of mouth, as the newness of a different gaze on reality, eventually reaching these two whom I don’t even know; I don’t even know who they are or if they are even Christians.

What is the newness of this gaze?

The newness of this gaze, as she told me, is that a possibility they couldn’t even imagine before had entered in them, i.e. that this new child was a gift for them. She read this in their gaze three days later, while three days before she had read only a sense of suffocation, a reduced definition of reality, including of that child.

Thank you.

I was very struck when at the meeting in Assago last Friday you affirmed repeatedly, and also very forcefully, that reality is positive because it exists, in the wake of what the tenth chapter of The religious Sense says, “The very first sense of the human being is that of facing a reality which is not his, which exists independently of him, and upon which he depends.” While reading chapter eleven, I felt it was very much in accordance with my experience, because my days are full of the needs described in that chapter; however, I also understand that often, in the name of the need that arises in me, I ‘kill’ the very reality in front of me. For example, in the name of the need for justice I get rid of the person who is unjust towards me. Instead, in this journey you don’t budge from the first point, that is, from the first paragraph of chapter ten that describes the objective fact of reality. Therefore this question comes up: why do I move away from it instead?

I was eager to listen to these witnesses because now we can understand what we are focusing on. I am going to read this letter because it summarizes the various aspects that came up, “Dear Julián, I am writing to you because for some time now you have been shouting - and you did it also last Friday at the meeting on the crisis in Assago [at the Conference Hall in Assago, not only here in our "backyard"!] – that reality is positive because it exists. All this insistence on your part provoked a question in me: I noticed in my experience that only the encounter generates in me such a gaze on reality, starting to perceive it as something positive. It is only since I encountered Christ that I started to perceive this, because previously reality for me was always a cage, from my studies to my family’s problems. Only when I encountered That which truly corresponds to my heart, I also started to face what was in front of me differently. Therefore, in short, I understand that the essential point is Christ, not reality. You told us that we can challenge everybody on this point of a wider use of reason, on the fact that reality is positive because it exists. So, I am asking you, ‘How is this possible?’ How is it possible for me to say to a friend who is suffering that reality is an opportunity, if this person has never known Jesus Christ? Can a person arrive to look at reality in the way Fr. Giussani describes it in *The Religious Sense* without having met Jesus? Maybe I didn’t understand what you have been saying lately. This is why I would like you to help me clarify this.” But look at what he says right after, as if it had absolutely no connection with what he had just written: “I wanted to add one thing. I cannot help recognizing that the statement ‘reality is positive’ bothers me. This is due to the influence of the powers that be that always tempt me to reduce the word ‘positive’ to ‘desirable’ or ‘pleasant’, as you told us. Nevertheless, I really wouldn’t be able to shout this thing as you are doing [we could say it among us, in our own backyard, in our parish hall, but to shout it to the world, no!] because it completely breaks any measure, it breaks my measure [he cannot say it because it continually breaks his measure]. I still think that the positivity of reality depends on the fact that circumstances are good or bad [like everybody else, and then one asks himself: what do we need Christ for?]. I cannot rid myself completely of this subliminal thought that keeps coming back each time I hear someone say that ‘reality is positive’.” This is like a snapshot of our problem! Without faith I cannot say, “Reality is positive,” but once I have faith is it enough to say, “Christ”?! But what does it mean for us to say, “Christ”? What is Christ? Is He a consolation? Is He only something that calms me down like a pill? Look at what a break there is between School of Community and our life, between what we say here and what we can say publicly. Well then, let’s start to focus on what we haven’t understood yet since January 26th (it doesn’t matter, we will understand, don’t worry): what is faith, that is, what is this encounter with Christ that it is able to reawaken all of man’s needs. We see that there is way of living and conceiving the

relationship between Christ and reason as if they were side by side. Where do we see that they are juxtaposed? In the fact that saying ‘Christ’ doesn’t coincide with a use of reason that allows me to say that reality is positive (“This statement bothers me so much”!). But many of you think that this happens because you don’t say “Christ”. And yet, this friend is saying “Christ”, and so he has taken a snapshot of the problem. Many times I was rebuked for the fact that I speak of reason and not of Christ – but this friend does speak of Christ - , or because I was speaking of the heart and not of Christ – but this friend does speak of Christ - ; but there is a way of speaking of Christ that is totally useless for our life! The problem is not that we are not speaking of Christ, but that Christ is affirmed without something happening in the person, in his relationship with reality. Pay attention: we are not claiming that one can live reality without Christ – of course not! -; the problem is what we mean by faith, because we can see that there is a way of saying “Christ” that is perfectly useless, because it isn’t able to take away the feeling of being bothered and, as he says, “it isn’t able to completely break my measure.” What is this ‘measure’ if not reason used as measure? And where does living using reason only as measure take us? To the fact that I live and relate to reality like everybody else, and I am not able to understand that the positivity of reality doesn’t depend on the fact that circumstances are good or bad: “I cannot rid myself completely of this subliminal thought that keeps coming back each time I hear someone say that ‘reality is positive’.” This means that there is a way of speaking of faith, there is a way of speaking of Christ, that is not able to widen reason, and then everything depends on whether reality coincides or not with my measure. When reality exceeds my measure, when the challenge of reality exceeds my measure, it is bad. We know what is the real nature of reason. We have known it forever, since *The Religious Sense*: this openness to totality documented by the entire tenth chapter and even more by the eleventh, when it speaks of positivism, of the sign, of the needs. However, as we can see, this openness doesn’t hold and it shuts down again. That impetus we are born with from our mother’s womb, the boundless curiosity of the child, disappears. This is why on January 26th we said that only Christ clarifies, educates and saves the religious sense, and that without this, without Christ clarifying it, educating it and saving it, our religious sense (that is, our reason, our freedom, our affection) fails. Then we said that Christ is the only one who can save the religious sense, because only He can reopen the ‘I’ wide, all the need of the ‘I’. Then, what shows us that Christ is present? We know that Christ is present not because we say “Christ”, as we often do, just as a name, and we don’t see Him, we cannot recognize Him; we know that Christ is present, that He is at work among us, because He is able to reawaken the religious sense, that is, reason, freedom and affection. This is why the religious sense is the verification of faith, of the encounter we had; because, there is a way of talking about Christianity in which, in the end, nothing is happening, so much so that it isn’t able to affect neither reason nor affection, not even for an instant. Therefore, we don’t understand when we say – this isn’t another slogan, mind you! – that Christianity is an event. The question is: what happens in the ‘I’ when Christianity happens? Does something useful for our life, for our relationship with reality, happen or nothing happens? Or is it only a superficial sentimentality, so that an instant later we go back to the previous measure? Is Christ truly able to reawaken our humanity? And what is this humanity? Is it our hair? Is our hair standing up straight? Or rather is it reason, freedom and affection? So, we are not talking of reason outside the Christian event; on the contrary, we are verifying if the Christian event is able to make us use reason like this, to reawaken reason like this. This is precisely why I continue to say that it is a problem of reason. Not because reason can be a true reason without the Event, but precisely because it is what saves reason! This is why at Beginning Day in answering the question, “Where does a reason like this

come from, and how can it be reached?” (it was all here), I answered, “A reason capable of recognizing reality in all its profundity is born and is realized in the Christian event [does it sound like I am talking about it without Christ?]. Through the power of the Christian event, reason fulfills its nature of openness before the very unveiling of God. One can understand why Father Giussani says that “the problem of intelligence is there” in the episode of John and Andrew [...]. For this reason last January 26th [...] we began with the reminder “the heart of our proposal is [...] the announcement of an event that happened, that surprises people in the same way, the angel’s announcement two thousand years ago in Bethlehem surprised the poor shepherds. An event that happens, before whatever consideration of religious or non-religious person.” And how can I know that this has happened, where can I see it? Or is it just a random statement? Is it just a word? If we are saying that Christianity is an event, how can I recognize that it’s happening? I am not talking about a thought, I am not talking about a feeling, and I am not talking about a state of being: I am talking about an event! And I was wondering: how can we tell that it has entered our life? And I was quoting Father Giussani again: “From the fact that “this event – says Father Giussani – re-awakens or strengthens the elementary sense of dependence and the nucleus of original evidences that we call ‘religious sense’ ” [...]. This is the reason why the Christian event makes man a man, i.e., more capable to live according to his original evidences, more able to be struck by the real, to live reality according to its truth. This is because it makes man able to use reason according to its true nature of openness to the totality of reality. As the Pope recently said in Germany, only a “reason open to the language of ‘being’[...] can reach reality.” So, if for us saying “faith”, saying “Christian event”, doesn’t mean a new use of reason, what does it mean then? We are not visionaries, because finally we can use reason according to its nature. If our Christianity, as Father Giussani says, is a Christianity without religious sense (as can happen), i.e., a Christianity that doesn’t open up our reason, we find ourselves saying Christ in our pious rituals, but we continue to be rationalists in life. In other words: the break between knowing and believing remains intact. This is not a problem for intellectuals. No, because when reality appears to me in a certain way, I don’t accept it anymore, and I can’t continue to say that reality is positive; because when I say that reality is positive, this is valid only if I can say it rationally, otherwise I will never be able to shake off my thought that, after all, I am only convincing myself. So, if we don’t have the courage to say to ourselves that reality is positive, imagine if we can have the courage to open up our mouth and say it to someone else! Can you understand that in this way our contribution as Christians is perfectly useless? Because if we continue to live reality like everyone else, why would others care about what we do on Sunday morning at mass or on Wednesday night here? It’s perfectly useless. So here we can understand what someone said this evening: when you are in front of someone who lives in a different and new way in front of a disabled son, a crack opens up in one’s usual gaze, i.e., one’s measure becomes wide open, a possibility opens up. What does it mean to open oneself up to the possibility? What did Fr. Giussani teach us about reason? That it means saving the category of possibility. Without this, there is no reason. Why did that girl say: “Failing in school saved me”? Because it opened her up, it opened up again the windows of her bunker, closed on her positivism and on her measure. So the tenth chapter is no different from the eleventh. I quote from page 111: “The sign, then, is a reality which refers me to something else. The sign is a reality whose meaning is another reality”. Reality and reality! Not reality and virtual reality, but, rather, reality and reality! Can a virtual thing generate a real thing? No. In order to explain a reality, another reality is necessary. If Fr. Giussani says this at the beginning, imagine what he will say about every need: every need, precisely because of its nature as sign,

needs to find another reality without which it would not exist, and could not be explained. Let's give an example about justice. A few months ago, while writing the preface to the book *Elementary Experience and Law*, written by some jurist friends, I stumbled upon the interview to the philosopher Paolo Rossi. With all he has written, in a certain way, his rationalist mentality was not able to close the circle. In what? He says: "I don't care at all about the proof of the existence of God. But I have this burden on my stomach: I can't easily accept the idea that the slaughterer and the victim vanish together in the nothingness". What does this say to us? That the need for justice which that professor has is of such nature that he is not able to solve the issue. And this doesn't happen only at the beginning of life or at the beginning of one's relationship with reality, because the more one feels the need of life, the more intense this need becomes. For this reason one's need is exactly what prevents us – and so I can respond to the last person who spoke this evening – from moving away from reality. Look at what Fr. Giussani says, in a sentence on page 114: "Without a perspective of a beyond, justice is impossible". He says the same about happiness a few lines below: "It would not be a rational or human way of looking at the experience of this need [*quid animo satis?*], if one did not perceive within it a reference to Other". The same applies to love or truth, in fact, it would be like an assassination of the human, it would be a withdrawal from reality if one were to give this up. Because the more one goes on, the more one sees that – as he says on page 116 – "the world 'demonstrates' *something else*, it demonstrates 'God' just as a sign demonstrates the thing of which it is a sign". So, how can we travel on this road? We had said that without accepting the challenge of reality, this will not reveal itself. This is because the meaning, that is the positivity of reality, is revealed only to those who accept the challenge of reality, sustained by this way of using reason. However, before the meaning is revealed, we are often already a thousand miles away, because we won't accept the category of possibility that in reality there is a promise that is revealed according to a plan that is not ours. Listen to what this letter says, by replying positively to the challenge: "Dearest friend Julián, I cannot and do not want to withdraw from your provocations any more. I cannot and do not want to withdraw from the constant and insistent challenge, yet full of charity, that you have been unceasingly directing at my heart for some months now. For this reason, with my back to the wall, I say to you: yes, Christ is the Only One Who enables man to bear life's blows. Christianity is the event that happened to me, for me, that has helped me re-discover and find again a human fabric [the re-awakening of the human is what demonstrates that Christ has happened] which I could not even imagine my heart and reason could be capable of [this is why when someone talks in a certain way about reason it's because one doesn't know what it is, nor what is new in our reason when Christ happens]. Christ, my Christ, is the Only One Who can sustain my life, whatever the reality I have to face may be. I have become aware [because it's not a problem of demonstrating: it's becoming aware] of the various aspects of humanity precisely by personally going through the drama of the current crisis because of work problems. I have nothing to defend. I am not ashamed to tell you that I went through a period in which I would get home exhausted after a day of work, because my only thought seemed to be what will it be of us, and I was afraid. Yes, I was scared to lose my job; I was worried about my future, about the future of my family, of my children. I discovered what terrible sense of anguish, what depression can take hold of our heart when you wonder: and now what will I do? Am I so powerless? Is it possible that I can't do anything [nothing is spared to her. Her experience is so human, no visions, no magical solutions, through darkness: are you interested in this?]? Being in such a tough situation, because, as you say, the Mystery did not even want to spare us the crisis, I allowed myself to look for help only in one thing, in my question [i.e., in my need], in my need

for an answer that would help me put my feet down from my bed in the morning without just feeling a knot in my throat, but looking for a meaning, looking for an answer in what I would have to face that day. This is where my humanity was re-awakened, because with such a thirsty heart I scratched and dug with my own hands what seemed to me just a reality full of mud, hoping to find a treasure, however small. Looking for a meaning in that way, asking in such a way, by grace, I came to realize that reality was talking to me, that Christ was talking to me within reality, and I started to follow the signs. I was following and letting myself be led; I was following and I was being carried. The more I followed, the more I was able to read the signs, to understand the language of being. Wow! How striking, what a tremor when I realized it, and I am so moved now as I am telling you about it. But the best came even after. All this amazement did not vanish, it didn't deflate [an instant later the feeling is gone], in fact it became "welded" in my heart when I understood, as I listened to you at the Beginning Day, that all this lasts only if my heart falls in love with that Face that my reason had just been forced to recognize in reality. Right there I understood that I was falling in love with the Mystery. When you fall in love, the only thing you wish for is to love more and more, to go deeper and deeper in that relationship, to get as involved as possible, and that it may become more and more familiar to you, more intimate, more yours. You'd like to become completely united with Him, more and more similar to Him, and look at everything with His eyes. Do you know what happened to me? That I looked at myself and found within me such a desire to love, with an intensity so exceptional for me. I am insisting on this with my friends, and I realize that we are not used to looking at each other in this way, to love each other in this way, with this deep respect so that as you look at the face of a friend you look at Christ with the corner of your eye. The deeper I go in my relationships, the more I find myself free, and I don't expect anything from others anymore because I am so happy [supported by a fullness: I expect nothing because I am so happy myself!] to love in this way. Just think, all this change in my heart starting from a moment of crisis. Last Friday, as I was listening to you at the Assago Forum, I was so moved because I could see myself described in your words, and everything became clear for me. Everything found again its unity in my life. It's not that in my life there is first a leaflet to hand out, then School of Community, and then Beginning Day; no, no, no, everything is united in my heart because His face has been revealed to my eyes; now I can't and I don't desire anything else but to love Him, my Christ, and follow Him and see where He'll take me, and what He has reserved for me. And what infinite and respectful emotion I feel when I pronounce His name ... Thank you Julián, thank you, because by leading me by the hand you took me and continue to take me within the One Who alone can make my heart glad". It's clear, I think.

Our next School of Community will take place on Wednesday **November 30th** at 9:30 pm. We'll review the Chapter 12 of *The Religious Sense*, ("The Adventure of Interpretation"). If the eleventh chapter talked about reason (the final part of the chapter is the discovery of reason), there the other big factor of the human comes in, freedom. Then, the question is to look at what experience of freedom we'll have in the next fifteen days, as described in the text. Look at how real what happened in our life is, how it has been so real, to enable us to be free.

Whoever wishes to send questions or short contributions to our mailing address sdccarron@comunioneliberazione.org, please do so by the evening of the Sunday before our School of Community meeting.

We have our Christmas poster, which I am going to read now. I think it's quite pertinent. "Human reason bears within itself [as the Pope says in his apostolic letter for the Year of Faith] a demand for 'what is perennially valid and lasting'. This demand constitutes a permanent summons, indelibly written in the human heart, to set out to find the One Whom we wouldn't be seeking had He not already set out to meet us [we would not use reason in this way, we wouldn't wish for Him, we wouldn't start our journey if he had not already come towards us]. In Him any trouble and yearning of the human heart finds fulfillment. The joy of love, the answer to the drama of suffering and pain, the power of forgiveness after receiving an offence, and the victory of life in front of the emptiness of death. All finds its fulfillment in the Mystery of His Incarnation". (Benedict XVI, *Porta fidei*, apostolic letter for the Year of Faith).

"Christ is not 'something' juxtaposed, but He is 'something inside'": within your joy, within your weariness, within your connivance or your shared living, within your repulsion or within your attraction. Our awareness of the Mystery present makes our life a continuous flow of new things. By recognizing this dramatic presence, this presence in which divinity is corporally living, something new 'begins': today, at eleven o'clock, at one, at six, at ten; tomorrow at three o'clock, at four. At any time something new begins". (Luigi Giussani).

It will be available next week.

Article of judgment by CL: "The Recession: a Challenge that calls for Change."

We suggest that the various communities organize public meetings to present the content of this article also referring to the exhibit *150 Years of Subsidiarity* because it goes along wonderfully with article in showing that what it says is perfectly reasonable, perfectly realistic because the entire history of Italy proves it (as you can see in the exhibit) even in times much harder than the ones we are living in.

Announcements: There will be a public meeting (like the one we did in Milan) in Rome, with Giorgio Israel, Antonio Polito and myself, on Thursday, November 17th.

Every year we propose two very important charitable gestures:

- Italian National **Food Drive** Day, that will be on Saturday, **November 26**, organized by the Food Bank Foundation;
- The **Avsi Campaign**, which this year will be titled "At the Root of Development: the Human Factor", to support, in particular, education projects to help in Kenya, Haiti, Egypt and Congo.

Many are the people we meet and who respond spontaneously to the Food Drive, and many others get involved out of an impetus of generosity and gratuity. It has become a national charitable gesture, we could say the charitable gesture of the Italian people. Many have this impetus, and yet they don't know the reason for it. So, staying together during the Food Drive or during the gestures of the Avsi Campaign, we can witness the origin, the deep reason of these gestures that educate us to charity much more than a thousand speeches, so that people can have a reason that makes this impetus of generosity something stable, so that they can understand it. Also, the current situation of crisis makes even more evident the reasonableness of these gestures, first of all for our education: by asking those we meet to help others in need, we can become more aware of everything we have received and we are still receiving; we can also discover how these gestures can educate a people to widen their horizon to everybody's needs.

Through these gestures we can also introduce people to the fact that we need something bigger, and that we don't participate in the Food Drive and the Avsi Campaign to fill the emptiness with

a generous gesture that then leaves us more skeptical than before. Rather, we do it out of a fullness that sustains us and out of gratitude for having found an answer to this need. Forgetting about these two educational proposals would be a real shame for our communities!

Veni Sancte Spiritus