

THE RISK OF EDUCATING: THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP
CAMBRIDGE, MA – JULY 17-20, 2009

KEY NOTE SPEECH BY CHRISTOPHER BACICH
JULY 18, 2009

Just a little bit about myself and why I dare to come before you to speak about this topic. First, the Ed Conference takes its work and inspiration from the life of Monsignor Luigi Giussani, himself a high school teacher and university professor for many many years in Italy, and the founder of Communion and Liberation as well. Here I want to make a quick note.

Fr. Giussani never intended to found anything. He, and perhaps some of you know the story already, he was on a career track, right out of the seminary. He was going to be a teacher in the seminary, on a career track in the Church, certainly headed to be a cardinal, and he encountered some high school students and decided it was clear, in the early 1960s, that those high school students did not have the same experience, awareness of the faith he had. So he decided to ask his superiors to go and teach in high school. Essentially, Giussani becoming a founder of a movement, began because he was an educator. I, myself, as a teenager, bumped into people from Communion and Liberation in the late 80s and in particular one guy 10 years older than me, recently married, who became very important for me, in my own personal history. As I said, this was in my teenage years and so really since that time I've been involved in one way or another, in this educational method that Giussani proposes.

I've been a teacher for 15 years, a history teacher not a religion teacher. I consciously made that choice and have confirmed that choice over and over again as a Catholic educator, exactly because it seems to me that the method that Giussani proposes is not something exclusively reserved for religion teachers. I want to say that from the outset, as I make my comments today. I have also, outside of the classroom, been involved in the education of young people and in particular the proposal to young people of the Catholic faith, and so again, this is where I am coming from in my own personal history and therefore why I dare to come before you and speak to you.

- 1) I don't consider myself an expert, but someone who has been seeking to constantly perfect his proposal to young people regarding what life is all about.
- 2) I want to talk a bit about the object of education and therefore the methods.

Today, in our world, in the vast majority of educational schools, the object of education is a physical, energetic reality that has come into existence by chance, by means of evolution. This is a highly complex, organic mechanism that we can call the human being, or person, but finally, whatever word you use to describe it, it is fundamentally a material reality, a material and organic mechanism. For this reason, educational theory is primarily ever more a scientific endeavor. That is, the same method by which we understand how light travels, how chemicals bond and are dissolved from their bonds, those are the same methods by which we seek to understand the mechanism we call the human being because there is nothing other than that physical energetic reality.

I don't agree with this way of understanding the human person. Right here I diverge, and right here is my first criticism of education today. The object of education includes everything I just said, plus an immaterial mysterious reality I am going to talk about today. An immaterial reality. It is a reality that exists but cannot be approached by scientific methods. For this reason I will not bombard

you with the latest scientific research. I am not going to talk about where educational scientific research stands today. Quite frankly it doesn't interest me all that much. At the same time I don't want to poo poo it. I understand its place in the discussion of education, I certainly do not believe we need to step back into the middle ages, and pretend that science has been some kind of terrible adventure in man's history leading to his eventual enslavement or something like that. I simply want to say that since the object of education is a physical reality which includes a mysterious, immaterial reality, I'm not going to bombard you with statistics and scientific research. However, I would beg those of you who have a greater familiarity and interest in these methods, help those of us involved in the Ed-Conference, tell us what we may need to change or add to the discussion, even at that level.

3)Ed-Conference.

Our work here doesn't aim at proposing the latest fad in educational theory. I have been an educator for 15 years and over the course of those 15 years, for at least 12 of them, I would come in at the beginning of the year, and my principal would talk to us faculty members about the latest book he read or the latest trend in educational theory. This was amazing for me. I couldn't believe over the course of one year everything could change, that in one year the entire educational institution had been revolutionized and finally we had discovered the missing piece. I was always a little bit skeptical about this and indeed our educational conference wants to avoid this sort of thing. Our work here aims at making a proposal, at sticking with the proposal of Monsignor Giussani that we think is an interesting proposal. What we are interested in doing here is to continuously develop observations about strengths and weaknesses and difficulties and objections to this proposal that Giussani makes.

I want to go back to last year's proposal which was, "Verifying a Viewpoint". I found a key quote in Fr. Medina's talk about the viewpoint, "Education as a way of teaching our students this relationship comes down to two key points. First, and I am quoting Fr. Giussani here, 'the constant striving toward totality:' attention to tie the particular to the totality, to read the particular in light of the totality and second a seriousness in the use of reason, and adherence to the methods of reality. This viewpoint is the way in which we express what the truth is and how we see this truth inform all of our reality. This is why Fr. Giussani calls it the hypothesis of meaning, and Neil Postman would call it a God, one of the Gods, or a world view, something that is capable of explaining everything, by which I see the truth explaining everything."

Last year we saw the key element of this educational vision is the proposal of a world view, a viewpoint on everything and ultimately this is what we believe is necessary in order to actually educate. This implies, as the title said, a process of verification. So, Fr. Jose continued, "Probably one of the greatest novelties in the thought of Fr. Giussani is that a clear presentation of the meaning of the nature of things is insufficient to meet the needs of a young person. He must be encouraged personally to confront the hypothesis, the viewpoint. This means the student must verify the original contents being offered him and no-one can do this work for the student."

Last year this need to verify a viewpoint, to place students in front of a world view, to do this continuously, in every subject at every level of the educational endeavor, and to encourage the students to verify that viewpoint, to invite them to a personal engagement with the viewpoint.
(Some personal notes that I did not think necessary to include)

The hinge pin of this educational proposal is the relationship between the educator and the student. I was talking to a friend last night and she was observing that this is not apparent, this does not seem to follow immediately and so I want to clarify why I say this. Ultimately the viewpoint is a proposal of

meaning, a proposal of the meaning of all things. Only a human person can affirm a meaning of any given reality. Therefore it is impossible that a human being can encounter a hypothesis of meaning that is not his/her own, it is impossible to meet, to be invited to a world view outside of the encounter with another human presence. Fr. Giussani gives an example in *The Risk of Education*. Imagine a very intelligent 4 or 5 year old kid who finds an old alarm clock that belongs to his grandfather, a wind-up alarm clock and starts pulling it apart. Imagine that this kid is really good at pulling the entire clock apart and scatters each piece, each spring, everything out in front of him. When he is finished, he bursts out crying. Why? Because he can't put it back together, he can pull it apart but what is missing is the synthetic idea that allows him to connect all of the pieces, to reconstruct what he de-constructed. What is missing for him is the clear sense of the meaning of the clock and the connection between every single piece that goes into the clock.

This is the human dilemma; that we enter reality as human beings and this is our problem. Let me give you another example. Imagine I were to take everything associated with the sport of baseball and I were to have some vast hanger, not far from area 51, and I were to put everything having to do with baseball in that hanger: the smell of fresh cut grass, men and women walking around saying, "get your hot dogs," everything. Radios playing, baseball cards, sports casters, TVs, everything associated with the sport of baseball. Imagine I were to bring someone unfamiliar with sport of baseball, let's say a woman from Tibet, and I were to place this young woman in the hanger. Imagine I were to ask her, "Explain the meaning of these things?" How long would it take her to describe the game of baseball? How long would she have to spend in the hangar trying to figure out how each of those elements was connected to the other. I would bet she would never come to the entire game of baseball. And this is one set of data, connected with one meaning, the game of baseball.

The human person enters reality and has that problem complicated not just by baseball, but everything. What I am trying to do is help us understand how impossible it is for us as single individuals to come to a meaning that would tie everything together: why I am born of my parents and not yours, why Napoleon was born before me and not after. Why a tsunami killed those people and not others. Everything; the existence and meaning of everything. You see how one human life is a blip. In 80 years what could one single human being shipwrecked on a desert island, what answer could he or she come to about the existence of all things? What I want you to understand is the breadth, the depth of the problem that faces us.

Not only that, but one enters reality, in front of this huge problem that demands a sense, a meaning, and there are competing world views. It is not that one enters a vacuum. We enter a world and ever more the world we enter exposes us to many world views very quickly. Now, in middle school, many students are studying competing religious views, Buddhism, Hinduism, along with Christianity, Islam, not to mention the ever present world view that claims that success and achievement are really the meanings of human existence. So we need help from other human beings in the task of evaluating the claims. How do we evaluate Buddhism versus Hinduism, versus the post modern world view. Who can help us evaluate the conflicting, ever more mutually exclusive world views? For this reason, we need an educator.

When you begin to think about the depth of this problem - we would never, never let a single individual human being get into a car- if you grasp what I am talking about - a relatively non complex reality, never would we allow a person who had not driven before, get into an automobile and simply do whatever that person wants. We would not dream to put that person there without a guide. The problem of life, the existence of things, is much more complex than driving a car, and the wounds inflicted upon the person are much deeper than the physical wounds that I can receive from a bad car

accident, because the physical wounds from a bad car accident don't take away the meaning of my life. Indeed I may have a meaning that may help me endure and understand the reason for those wounds. The wounds we are talking about here are at the level of that immaterial reality that I spoke of before.

For this reason, Fr. Giussani opened up a very famous address to educators back in '77 asking, "Where you are, are you a proposal?" So this is the question I make to you educators. Where you are, are you a proposal? Is your life a proposal? The fruitfulness that reveals itself within one's flesh and spirit is given by the perception of oneself as communication, as proposal. With all that is vile, miserable, contradictory, impotent, limited, banal, ephemeral of one's being, yet all of this doesn't limit the awareness of what has been given, and constitutes the meaning of life.

If this is the key relationship, education can never take place outside of the relationship, therefore, between a human educator and a student. Obviously there is an implicit question in the role of technology which I am not going to get into now, but how do we square what I am saying with the ever more omnipresence of technology? And here I don't mean the education in schools, I mean simply education. I mean simply a human being who comes into existence in the United States of America in 2009. By the time that person reaches the age of 10, there is going to be a huge impact of technology and there is going to be already a relationship created between that individual and technology which is going to be absolutely important for that student's existence. There are lots of questions which open up, and which, for now, I will not alight on.

2) If this relationship is so key, if my claim, if Giussani's claim is that there cannot be education outside of this relationship, we come to this question; upon what does the relationship found itself? What is the foundation for the education between the educator and the student? Let us do some background here. If any of us are still in the classroom, I think even if you are an administrator having to speak and deal with students, none of us can deny the sense of a gap between us and the students. I have only been teaching for 15 years and I can tell you the sense of that gap is widening at a rate faster than I am aging, the sense of that gap is deepening day by day. Quick background. G. Stanley Hall, famous researcher, known as the father of "adolescence" studies, identified adolescence as a particular stage through which all human beings pass. Probably at the level of psychological studies this was important, but if we look at pop culture in the United States, the key figure was Frank Sinatra. Previous to Frank Sinatra, in popular culture here in the United States, children, adolescence and adults all shared one culture, which was basically Bing Crosby.

It was with the arrival of Frank Sinatra, who in a particular way enthralled teen age girls, with the subsequent arrival of Elvis Presley and the Beatles, that solidified an American pop culture specific to the adolescent, and since that time the distance between adolescence and adults has only grown. Now we see in our own post modern culture, how this odd development which is adults who don't want to leave that period, and on the contrary perhaps even want to re-enter that reality of adolescence, that culture of adolescence. So we have this strange cultural phenomenon right now where a person doesn't want to leave that culture, or if they are older, and maybe they want to connect with their students or the culture so they want to jump back into the culture of adolescence. But if one accepts adulthood and all that goes along with that, one finds oneself ever more distant from the kid who whips out a piece of technology and uses it almost continuously. For example, I found myself on a bus with a teenage girl along with other teenagers who I was on a trip with this summer, and this young girl pulls out a cell phone and starts what seemed to me to be a text message. When I asked her what she was doing she said, "I am writing a message on my friend's Facebook wall." I asked her who. She said "her", "Who?" "Her." She was sitting in front of...no, you can't make this stuff up folks...she was sitting in front of the girl on whose facebook wall she was writing. I said, "but she is sitting right behind you,

why don't you just turn around and tell her what you want to say?" "Oh, but this is more fun." This is happening ever more and can make us feel distanced from our students. I want to argue that this is a positive thing for us. It makes trying to establish - I remember growing up in the 70s when you would meet certain teachers who wanted nothing more than to be your buddy. I found that strange and off putting. I argue this is a positive thing because ever more therefore, it is impossible for us as educators to establish a relationship with students based on tertiary cultural elements and so it begs the question even more.

So, on what do we found the relationship? What Giussani proposes is that the only thing left is what is identical between me and the students. What makes the student and me, one One. Literally the same. This is what Giussani identifies with the word Heart. Sometimes he also refers to this as the religious sense. Giussani identifies the core of the human person with the religious sense or the heart. He says, "The religious factor represents the nature of our I in as much as it expresses itself in certain questions: What is the ultimate meaning of human existence, or, why is there pain and death, or in the end why is life worth living? Or from another point of view, what does reality consist of, what is it made for? Thus the religious sense lies at the level of ourselves, it coincides with the radical engagement of the self with life; an involvement that exemplifies itself in these questions, the radical engagement of the self with life. What Giussani proposes and certainly what I affirm, is that the only point solid enough to ground this relationship, is at this level, the level of the need for meaning; the level of the need for the meaning of our existence, the level of ourselves which demands fulfillment. We are not present to these questions and these needs at all times. Moments come along in our engagement with reality that uncover and reveal to us the urgent nature of these questions.

While I was doing my undergraduate work in San Francisco, I had a good friend whose friend was coming back from Los Angeles, up Highway 10, the beautiful highway that traverses the pacific coast. While her friend was coming around a corner, a truck hit the car she was in head on, and my friend's friend went through the windshield, hit the truck in front head on and died instantaneously. My friend came to me sobbing, asking, "Why did that have to happen. It is so unfair, she was going to be a lawyer, she was so intelligent." Something happens, and the question is no longer about what happens, but is a question about existence. What happens becomes a pretext to ask a question about existence. Why do things like this happen, why should she have died? These questions are not always at the forefront of our awareness, we are not always conscious of this level of a need for the justification for our existence, but things happen in our lives, often painful. Sometimes on a rare occasion, it is the sense of the spirit, the sense of the fact that even the most beautiful things are not enough to raise these questions. What is the point of it all? What really is the point of it all?

For this reason, since talking about the heart, we are talking about that which demands an answer to everything. Totality is a key word, and Giussani says, "Less than totality is not rationality. Rationality means awareness of reality according to the entirety of its factors. According to this reason, man must always see and perceive himself, sincerely, humbly searching, continuously. To educate is to help one understand the factors of reality in their fruitful multiplication up to point of totality. That totality that always remains as the true horizon of one's action."

The true horizon of one's action. I was recently talking with teenagers about this question, the question of our heart, the question that demands a reason for everything. One of these people said, "I went to Australia last year. You can't believe how excited I was to go to Australia, and how excited I was to be there. I was there with people who I love and who love me. But I was walking along a street, and at a certain point, I asked myself this question, "what is missing?" because something was missing. And I couldn't put my finger on it. And not withstanding the fact that I was in Australia and I wanted to be in

Australia, notwithstanding that I had the people who loved me and who I loved very much surrounding me, notwithstanding these facts, I had a sense of something missing and I had no clue what it could be, because I thought before going to Australia that what was missing was being in Australia.” This is the level of the heart. Giussani says, “That totality that always remains as the true horizon of one's actions.” Here, in this example, the horizon of this person's action was to go to Australia, to be in Australia, and yet once there the true horizon of the action opens up, something mysterious, something that was missing while being there in Australia.

Giussani says that education is proposing an answer to a question that you live. If what we have said so far holds true, it means that it is only in as much as this problem, this heart, this problem of the meaning of reality, it is only in as much as my heart is open, it is only in as much as I feel, I sense, I live, I suffer, what that young person suffered in Sydney, that I can be an educator; because that is the problem of education. Because what that person described in Sydney is going to happen to that person, when that person marries, has children, gets the dream job. This sense that something is missing is going to creep into that person's life, all the way up to the end.

My mother told me about my grandfather's death of cancer. My grandfather, knowing full well he had cancer, but not wanting to let go of life. That sense that even in front of death, this sense that something is missing and dying is not going to give it to me. There is something that is missing, that I still have not conquered. It is this sense about life that is the key to education. Why? Because education is to propose an answer to that. To propose a viewpoint. Giussani talks about this need to live this question, “To educate means to propose something. But it would mean to dump something on someone externally, if it were not the proposal of a response to the question that you live. If you don't live the question, the response you propose is fake.

Many of us are educators and we want to propose an answer to our students. We want to propose to our students an answer, our faith. We want to pass it on, communicate it. Giussani is saying, if in me there is not alive this sense of the drama of existence and the way that the presence of Christ answers that drama, I can teach all the doctrine I want, I can propose as many moral laws as I like, but it is all extrinsic. All extrinsic. I was struck by this many times going to World Youth Day. Ostensibly young people are there because the Pope is there, because of the proposal of the faith. But if you walk around at 1:00 in the morning, you will see that what is defining World Youth Day is not the proposal of the faith, but the proposal of the wider culture at large. What really defines often the way the young people relate to one another, the activities in which they engage, is not at all the proposal of the faith, because what actually answers the need for fulfillment, what seems to be the actual response to the need for fulfillment, to the demands of the heart, are the activities proposed by the wider culture.

They may be able to tell you the 10 commandments, they may be able to walk you through the Catechism of the Catholic Church, but it is extrinsic, and if extrinsic, then the educator dumped it on them as something extrinsic. It means that in the relationship with the educator there was never a connection between the drama of living and what is proposed as the explanatory hypothesis - to use Giussani's term - for why this drama exists. Giussani continues, “If education is to propose, this proposal may arrive to the other's heart, may actually move the other only by the strength of an energy of which your presence is the origin, and that energy is there if you value and love life, if you know what it is.”

In this sense, you could say education is constantly going on. Only in this reduced sense, in the sense that the students who meet us, perceive from us what is valuable. They may not be able to cogently

express it, they may not be able to articulate it, but they feel it, they sense what really matters in our life – and that is what we communicate to them. In my 15 years of teaching, most people were communicating to their students, regardless of what they were teaching, that what mattered most in life was achievement. That without achievement, life is tasteless. That what gives real taste for life is achievement.

Now, to be concrete, I want to explain that over the last 15 years, I have not experienced this as a theory, it seems to me that this is really what education is. Therefore it has been my effort for the past 15 years, to elicit this level of participation, even in my teaching of history. I don't think you can communicate what history is without this level. Why? I will give some examples. Let's look at the modern utopias. Whether you look at utopia born of enlightenment, political theory in writers like: John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and therefore the political expressions of those utopias; the foundations of the United States of America, foundation of the French Republic, the "wards" of

I cannot understand from audio what the complete word which sounds like wards is

independence in Latin America or if you look at the Marxist option, the Bolshevik revolution, the USSR, there is a question in them. This is how I introduce this era to my students: What do we do about injustice in the world? What is the answer to injustice? This is a real problem for everyone on earth. For some more than others. Some are born into situations fundamentally more unjust than others. How do we address this problem? This is how it was addressed by people in the 1700s, in 1917. What was wrong in the way they addressed that problem, what did they miss, what was lacking? What did they see? All modern ideologies tie themselves to the heart. For the heart demands a reason for their existence. For Stalin, for Lenin, the reason for their existence was to establish a classless society, it was for this reason that to kill millions of people wasn't a problem, because the reason for everyone's existence as put forth by Marx was to establish the worker's paradise, this was the culmination of history, it was the reason for human existence. There is no other way of putting it.

We could say that vision of history was defeated in 1989, partially, but now we live in another version, which is that the meaning of human existence is the expression of personal individual freedom. This is the meaning of existence. One cannot understand what is going on in history without this level of the human being. Last night we heard music by Haydn and Mozart How can you explain that expression of human existence without reference to this level of human sense of something deep that is missing, something unfathomably profound that exists in the human person at every moment of his existence?

We could put it another way: With reference to evolution, exclusively to a chance and random process which brings us into existence, how can we explain what we heard last night? What evolutionary function can we tie that to?

This is last example, with the Nazis. I love to ask my students, "Were all Nazis evil? How evil? Was the man who was the guard at the gate of Auschwitz, more evil compared to the man who undressed the victims, to lead them to the gas chamber, versus the one who thought up the system? How do we measure evil? Without this question, we can never understand the problem that Nazism poses to us today.

You can imagine these same questions in the humanities. And in the sciences. What was driving Einstein in his work? What drives the scientist to spend countless hours looking at a worm, at the genetics of a worm in a lab at NYU and Stanford?

If what we found the relationship upon is the heart, what is the goal of relationship? The goal of the relationship with the students is the students' fulfillment. If we have talked about heart as this need for a justification for the totality of things, there is one thing that is very, very important - ME. The first thing that needs to be justified is ME. My existence. Whether I am born with AIDS, whether I am born to a drug dealer, or to an affluent family in Montgomery County, I need to know the why of my existence.

Fr. Medina said last year, there is an answer proposed today; it is achievement. If you like to be a bungee jumper off the Grand Canyon, or be a drug dealer making lots of money, or Michael Jackson and change your skin color, you choose the kind of achievement you would like to engage in. We will give you the maximum freedom to choose the kind of achievement you would like to engage in, but in the end this is the reason for your existence. If you want to be good Catholics, you can find the perfect spouse, have 12 children and homeschool. In the end it is just a question of personal choice. That is, you are going to have 12 children and I am going to go to San Francisco and live the homosexual life style. In the end it is one continuum, in the end it is one answer. YOU choose what you want to achieve and you achieve it.

Giussani says, "In these questions, the ones that come from the heart, the adjectives and the adverbs are the decisive word, at its core what is the ultimate sense of life? At its core what is reality made of? Why is it worthwhile for reality to exist? These types of questions exhaust the energy, all of reason's searching energy requires a total answer, an answer that exhausts completely the whole category of possibility." So, education therefore, becomes helping the student reach out to that which can justify, which can give reasons for his existence and the existence of all things. As I said before, freedom is the capacity for an infinite; Something infinite which can fulfill me.

The main thing I want to touch on is that this is not an intellectual need. Or rather, to separate our intellect and affection is already to do violence to ourselves; because our intellect and our affection are one thing. Think, what do you really know? You know those things in which you are interested. Those are the things you really come to know. For whatever reason. Baseball, the Civil War. You come to know those things you are interested in. You bump into the Boston Red Sox because you are born in this town you poor thing, and for whatever reason that reality begins to interest you, and since you spend 45 years of your here, that reality takes over more and more of your life and you come to know it, certainly much better than a person who lives in New York. Why? Because quite frankly I am not interested in it. And the fact that you know a lot about the Boston Red Sox makes me feel really sorry for you. But that is the way the encounter with reality really works. We bump into something, and something appears more interesting than something else and therefore we follow up the relationship with that thing and we come to know it.

What is it I can come to know that justifies my existence? The pain, the emptiness, the difficulty, the beauty? What can justify the fact that I didn't choose to be. If one thing is clear, it is that I cannot justify it, I cannot find why I should be, in me. Maybe I find it in baseball, my kids, but I cannot find it in me. This is the strange thing about us as human beings -we need something to justify our existence that is not us. What can justify our existence? To educate therefore, is to help a young person to reach out to, introduce a young person into relationship with, that reality that can justify their own existence. And since, as I was saying before, if Baseball becomes something important for my existence – I am engaged in the relationship, I take possession of certain things in that relationship. For baseball addicts you take possession of lots of statistics, information, the names of various baseball players, how they performed in this and that year, the years they played, how they performed, the games they were

involved in, you take possession of lots of information. Here you see freedom at work. Freedom is the capacity to take possession of things in the relationship with something that is of interest to me.

We can say that we can see if we are doing well as educators, if in our students we see curiosity, desire, at work in them. And finally, if we see a willingness in them to put to the test the viewpoint that we propose. This is the real measure of education.

For those of us working in Catholic institutions, we have to ask ourselves, honestly, I think we have to face up to this, and this is why this conference is here and this is why we want to have ever more people with us. When your kids get out of Catholic institutions, are they curious and desirous to see how the proposal, this view point, offers, answers life? Is that really what they are interested in? I would venture to say this is not on the radar screen at all.

We talked about the goal of the relationship as an object. Now, what is the dynamic of the relationship? What is the dynamic of the relationship I have with this thing in my hand? (pen). Use. I use it, I know what it is, I know its nature and I dominate it by means of my reason, and since I dominate it by means of my reason, I even dominate it physically, I put it to use. This is a relationship of possession. In the Roman world it used to be that you could possess three things: things that did not move and did not speak, like the pen, things that move but did not speak, animals, and things that move and speak, human beings. It was Christianity that taught the world after a long time, that you could not establish a relationship of possession with another human being. Because the other person is free, because they have this capacity for an infinite, something that would fulfill them, for a mystery, ultimately for the mystery of God, and because person is essentially that capacity.

This comes clear in simple expressions from our language, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." You can bring a person to what answers their thirst, but you cannot drink for them. The person must take hold of it for him/herself. This is a very important thing to keep in mind, in the dynamic with students. And not only this, that is, we can make a clear proposal as to the meaning of things with our person, we can be engaged in the problem of our own existence, we can live that which we propose as the viewpoint on existence, in the first person, as a problem of my own existence and we can communicate that when we are in the classroom with the person, but the person can reject it.

The teaching of original sin is one of those dogmas which most illumines the quandry of human existence. St. Paul, but even Cicero before St. Paul, but here we will listen to St. Paul: "I do the evil I don't want to do, and don't do the good I don't want to do."

In other words, our students may be exposed to something beautiful and attractive, something that offers an authentic possibility for the answer to life and yet still not have the strength to adhere to it. I think it is in front of that weakness, that you see whether or not you are actually an educator. In front of that weakness, the educator is patient and merciful. That is, the educator keeps loving. Fundamentally you could say, the relationship between the educator and student is one of love: I affirm your need for fulfillment and I recognize your incapacity in taking hold of it, and even your incapacity for taking hold of it for me is not a problem. Because, by the way, that is one of the things that needs an explanation, it is one of the greatest things that needs an explanation in our human existence. Why can't be I be the father I want to be, the husband I want to be, the educators that want to be? I have these images; it is going to be different this year. By the time you hit October, it is all the same! It is the last period of the day, you've got 40 kids in front of you and you find yourself saying, "OK, take out your books, read from page 63 to 75 and do the questions in the back and 'DON'T SAY ANYTHING.'".

And then you sit down with your newspaper in the back and you say to yourself, "I told myself I wasn't going to do that, but these kids, these kids!" Why can't I be the educator I want to be? This is dramatic. So, in front of this weakness, you show yourself to be an educator. It is exactly because your students may glimpse in you the possibility of a much greater life, and yet may reject you. It is in front of that weakness we show ourselves to be educators.

Now I want to talk about the context of the relationship. This is very important. The kind of relationship that I am talking about is not the relationship that we commonly call a relationship between mentor and mentee. This is not what I am talking about. Why? When we speak of mentor, we typically speak of an individual alone. We speak of one individual who is intelligent with certain personality traits. I think about the main character in the book all of us were given as a gift, Orlando. The person alone. The man or woman alone. The star teacher. We see them in our schools, we know who they are. They have a particular gift. This is not what I am talking about. I think it is unhealthy. Why? Because it tends to tie the student not to the truth, but to the educator. It tends to bind the student not to totality, to the search for something more, going deeper, the adventure of existence. It doesn't launch the student, the young person on an adventure of his/her own. It tends to bind the student. Ultimately, the context of this relationship must be one of communion. It finds itself in the way that Christ Himself, presents Himself to the world. "All of you will abandon me and leave me quite alone, but I am never alone because I am always with the Father. I and the Father are one." Or you remember during His earthly ministry, John 20:21 "As my Father has sent me, so I send you." If the educator doesn't finally conceive him/herself as belonging to something greater than him/herself, then he/she doesn't really educate. Here of course, for us, our proposal is the proposal of Christianity. But even for a researcher or professor, who doesn't finally vaguely conceive of him/herself as belonging to the truth that he/she is discovering in research, in what he/she teaches, this is what leads to a personalistic relationship that I was talking about before. It is not a problem of the students, but of the educator. The educator doesn't conceive him/herself as belonging to the truth, rather conceives him/herself as belonging to him/herself.

The educator is always proposing not him/herself, but the answer he/she belongs to. This has to come clear in the relationship with the student. The student has to know that that which I am passionate about, is that which matters. The viewpoint which has convinced me about the authenticity of existence is what I belong to and what I want to introduce you to. It is my relationship with that, which animates me and makes me who I am. So you don't have to be afraid of walking away from me at graduation, and actually that is why I am going to push you away from me as an educator. I want to push you away from me toward something bigger than me, to that which I love, that which gives meaning to my existence.

Having talked about the context of the relationship, this word communion is also therefore., and this is my final point, if we say the goal of relationship is the fulfillment of the individual person, it begs a question. What is method by which I arrive at this fulfillment? And the method by which I arrive at this fulfillment, is communion.

Don't be put off. This is a banal human truth. Let's go back to baseball. The man or woman who is the huge Boston Red Sox fan, has season tickets, and knows everything there is to know about the Boston Red Sox, schedules his/her life around the games, this person finds fulfillment in communion with the Boston Red Sox. That is all I am saying. The man who has a stamp collection finds fulfillment in communion with his stamps. Obviously, it is a banalization, a reduction of the word to use the word that way, but it only goes back to what I said before. The justification of our existence we don't find in ourselves, therefore the problem of fulfillment is always the problem of the establishment of a

relationship with something. It might be my I-pod, it might be my blackberry, it could be any number of things. It could be my school, it might be my family, it is the establishment of a relationship with something outside me, that gives me fulfillment.

What is the relationship, the relationship with a capital R that is actually fulfillment for us? It is the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is what we said. Finally we say that life has no taste, that life is flat, that life is empty, without the relationship with the Trinity. But the Trinity is utterly beyond our comprehension and not only that, because of that, our freedom to adhere to that which is true and beautiful and good has been wounded, that wound was caused by a severing of that relationship.

Let's go back to the woman from Tibet. She comes into the hanger with everything having to do with baseball. She could live for 120 years, she could live for 10,000 years and she will never come up with game of baseball by seeing all the constituent factors of baseball. Who can come up with a relationship of love with God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit by encountering trees and people and stars and death and pain and suffering? It is not something that is apparent; it doesn't lie within our capabilities of discovery. It is because that reality made itself present in the incarnation, that we know this reality. Giussani says, "Man is relationship with the eternal mystery, the Trinity, that we know as the reality of Christ. Christ's humanity is that relationship that allows us to keep our eyes, heart and above all mind, (above all mind) open to the true reason our mother pushed us out of the womb. For which our father and mother conceived us: the relationship with the infinite."

Quite simply that relationship does not exist as a possibility for fulfillment now, in my existence as it is now, outside of the possibility of the encounter with the physical reality which bears the mystery of the Trinity. That physical reality which bears the mystery of the Trinity is the community of believers. For this reason the educator who comes from this world view, who has this proposal, wants to introduce the student to this communion.

What I am saying here again is a simple truth we all know. If we look back at the history of Catholic schools in America, how many of the orders that ran schools, how many of those orders received vocations from the students who went to those schools. I met brother so and so. I met sister so and so, I met father so and so, but their lives were clearly not a witness to their own personalities, they were a witness to a communion with other people, so much so that my attraction for those people in those classrooms, didn't lead me to idolize this or that sister, this or that father, although this or that sister, this or that brother may have become a person exceptionally dear in my life, perhaps even dearer than my family members, but it was by means of that relationship that I was introduced to the community from which that person came.

We can't be too simplistic, but you can see that the crisis of vocation that everybody is praying about at masses now - the vocation prayer that you have to pray after communion as if mass were not long enough already, we have to now go through the vocation prayer. Why? Because there is no longer the educator who witnesses to the communion in which he or she is rooted, and to which he or she points the student.

We, as educators, don't point to the communion of believers as the point of fulfillment of human life. And that brings us back to what we said at the beginning. Education, as Giussani says, is the proposal of an answer to a question I am living. So this begs a question of us Catholic educators: Is the communion with Christ in the Church, is that reality that which we live as the answer to the problem of our existence. It seems to me that we are at a point of history, if it isn't, we will have Catholic

institutions, and they will crank out good citizens whose minds and hearts have been fashioned by the culture at large. So we may be able to count sports heroes, CEOs, important lawyers and politicians, we may be able to count them as alumni of our Catholic institutions, but when they are in front of senators and congressmen because they may be confirmed as a Supreme Court Justice, they will talk about abortion as settled law.

There will be six graduates of Catholic institutions on the Supreme Court. How many Catholics graduates are in our Senate, in our House of Representatives, how many Catholic graduates are in our assemblies across the country, in our states. I am not blaming them; I am trying to put us in front of the drama of Catholic education. I am trying to get to the root of the problem. The problem is not whether or not the institutions will continue. The institutions are a fruit of something else.

Let's flip it around. There were no Catholic schools at the time of St. Paul. There was a man who communicated the fact that in a world where you could believe whatever you wanted, where you could go and pay to watch one man kill another for sport, in a world where everything goes, because that was world of the Roman Empire. In that world, much like the world we live in today, a world where anything goes, some people mysteriously abandoned that way of life for something they found more fulfilling. The problem is not the institutions, the problem is where are the St. Pauls? Where are the people who recognize that in that communion, is the fulfillment of life? Those people are the educators. Those are the people we are called to be.

Thank-you.