

Notes from the School of Community with Julian Carron
Milano, 7 October, 2009

The text being referred to: “Experience: The Instrument for a Human Journey”, International Assembly of Responsibles of Communion and Liberation, La Thuile, August, 2009, insert in *Traces* n. 8, September 2009, pp. 3-21.

Life is a journey, but many times we find that it is different than what we imagined: “I couldn’t believe that my journey would be like this”, and I realize that I wasted time and “therefore I want to continue the journey with you”. Let’s begin this meeting with two songs: *Il Viaggio*, by Claudio Chieffo and *Noi Non Sappiamo Chi Era*.

- *Song “Il Viaggio”*
- *Song “Noi Non Sappiamo Chi Era”*

To those who are connected via satellite in Italy I want to say that this year attempting this connection for the School of Community is—as I said at the Beginning Day—an occasion and an example for learning a method for our work on the text, so much so that the labor and the work that we do might have an adequate reason for arriving at the goal; and the goal of this work, of this gesture, is simple: that there be a judgment of experience, of our own experience. It’s clear that it is a little more difficult for those who want to intervene here—those who are here present—because you have to take into consideration this new circumstance, both in what you say and how you say it, so that everyone can understand; you have to put yourself on the line, publically, more than you had to last year. And so, you need to prepare your interventions well so that we don’t waste time; you must be precise, not dragging on too much, and go to what is essential in a way that everyone can understand. This is how we can help each other the most. Those who speak are not speaking to only those here present but also to those connected throughout Italy; it is necessary—I repeat—that we take this into consideration.

Another observation. We need to remember our direction in this beginning of our work because, as we saw in the text of the International Responsibles Assembly, where we took up again one of Giussani’s texts on experience, the last of which is the fundamental method of human development; it is the instrument for our human journey. For this reason, we want to understand exactly what this method is because without learning it well there is no human development, there is no way to take up the path, the journey. At the Fraternity Exercises—as you all remember—we synthetically explained what experience is. What happened next? In the work we did, speaking of experience, the reductions to experience came out; and this is what we tried to address at the International Assembly of Responsibles and the Beginning Day: we explained what these reductions look like. This is why we were invited to work on these two things: the Introduction and the lessons in the booklet “Experience: The Instrument for a Human Journey”, keeping in mind the Beginning Day (printed on *Page One* of the October *Traces*). Thus, the School of Community is inserted into this path and is a verification of this work.

I will begin with two questions with which everyone who speaks must try to answer through their own experience: at what time and in what situation have I perceived to have really had an experience as it has been described? What helped me to understand that I have had an experience? I am asking this so as to help us to not have a discussion about experience but to

help us to share facts which helped me to see that I had an experience, or on the other had, where didn't I have an experience. This is why it is a journey: even when one make a mistake we can learn form it, but the problem is to be aware.

Now, let's begin.

I want to read a letter that a friend wrote you. "Dear Julian, I am writing this quick note to let you know how I am doing. At the end of July I was exhausted, destroyed by what had happened to me and no longer able to breathe. The vacation was an occasion to breathe again and to get back to work, re-reading the School of Community and the Fraternity Exercises without the prejudice that bottom line I couldn't change anything; re-reading them through the lenses of the events that marked me this year. Without a doubt it has been a tough year, but how can I not be marveled by what has been happening day after day in this time of rest? Even arriving to the point in which I said: all of strength that I had in front of this year, who gave it to me? How can I not say thanks? At times I say that reality is not what I want, but for me today this is completely false. When I think of everything that has happened to me in my life, a great deal of the time it is exactly as I imagined, but the problem is that after a while, whatever it is, I am disappointed, it isn't enough, I want and need more. To realize that it's never enough, that there is always something missing, what a grace to be marveled by this, to find yourself here and to begin from this lack! This summer was the first time that I was able to look at the facts that happened or that were happening and be able to say His name, not as a consequence of what my eyes were seeing but as something that co-existed with the thing or the situation; it has never happened to me to experience His company in this way. Anything can happen but to not feel yourself alone, to experience His company in the things that happen or are seen was seemingly unimaginable for me to the point that when I heard others speak of this I would doubt that what my eyes saw was possible. But what companionship is this that places in me a desire to do better then before? That makes me freer in my attempts to build, truly freedom from every result, even in from making a mistake? How can I not be in wonder looking at what's happening now after the vacation? To be aware that what I want is so disproportionate to what I receive, so much so that I can not tell if something is positive or not because every time I think something is negative it reveals itself to be positive. Having said that, I need to seriously be aware also of how I use the time that is given me; to live one must also rest, have memory, judge so as to be aware of what happens; to be rested because otherwise instinctivity, as it happened to me for so long, takes the upper hand. With gratitude."

Thank you because this letter described clearly what experience is because, as he says, "many times I thought reality was not what I desired, but I was totally wrong; many times reality is what I imagine": we fulfill what we imagine, what was have in our heads, and nothing is missing (in that I need to do a better job at fulfilling what I imagine), and when it happens like I've imagined; after a while I need another. Life is not a problem when things don't go well, but when they go well, when I get what I want, because then I can't get mad at what happens, I can't get mad a reality. It is here that the real problem emerges, we see what the challenge is: if I am not satisfied even when things go like I want them to then what is it that I want? To be aware that it is never enough, that something is always missing, that is, that I am always being pushed towards something else: what a grace to be astonished by this! What do you understand by this? He began with his relationship with reality, really from there in the experience he is having, and he had to say His name—"to be astonished to find

ourselves beginning from this lack”. This was “at the same time” as the situation, as what is happening, not that I abstract something from a situation and think of something else, brushing away the sign, forgetting reality. No, it is really there, as we said at the Beginning Day: looking at the woman’s beauty, Giacomo Leopardi traced it to the “divine ray”. It’s not that we need to forget about beauty, but it is there, within it. “I have never experienced His companionship in such a way; anything can happen now and I know that I am no longer alone”. The goal of education, the goal of journey we are beginning, that we are on, is this. It isn’t that we don’t forget anything, but that in everything we discover His presence in this way. When others tell you, you can have your doubts. And how can you see that there has been a change? In that you begin to be aware of the difference from what happened before; before when someone told you such things you had your doubts, as there was no experience and thus, doubt prevailed. How do you know that you have had an experience? By the fact that doubt no longer prevails. “In the end, how can you not be in awe looking at what is happening now?” When this begins to happen I begin to want it and look at how I use my time. You can see that it is an experience so real that it reaches to the point of how one uses time; it’s like when one falls in love; you need time for something else that before was not part of your day. It is so real that it needs my time. Why? So that one has memory, so that one can become aware and judge what is happening. This is an example of how it happens. In the last *Traces* I read and interview, “The Breath of Conversation” by Fabrice Hadjadj and it said that, “it is pressure from Heaven that makes us hope for a happiness more vast than this world, and that allows us to experience this world in its extreme precariousness”; it is the pressure from Heaven, as he calls it, that reality evokes in us something greater, for which we are made.

Let’s go.

It is really out of gratitude that I am speaking tonight. I want to share what happened to me after the last School of Community here, and the work of judging that was instilled in me here. For those who were not here: I intervened telling you about my father who had been in a coma for three weeks, and I said that I didn’t understand what you had said at the Fraternity Exercises, that “the circumstances in which God gives us are essential factors for the vocation to mission in which we are called”, or better yet, I understood the sentence but it said nothing to me, as I was crushed by the my situation and very confused. Then, after School of Community, because I didn’t understand the key to reading the situation that you gave me, I told you, “Yes, but you recognize Christ in what happens and I don’t. I would like to have your experience.” You then said to me, “You would like to, but you don’t do the work”. The discussion lasted a minute, but I was pretty wounded by it, and when I got home I thought, if I’m not doing the work, I want to give it a shot.

Was it true or not?

It was true, it was really true! I went home and said, now I am going to keep a diary; I am going to make myself write the things that happen during the day (because usually I let them pass by without looking at them) with only one promise, that if Carron says that I need to begin with my discomfort and my needs I have to be honest with myself, I need to stop being afraid of what I think. Thus, the only promise I made with this loyalty—and I hope no one finds my diary, as I was really loyal.

Don't worry, we won't send it to the newspapers...

In the beginning there was only dryness and confusion, as I was like that; at that time I was on vacation visiting my parents, and there was a lot of intensive therapy and other things to do. One evening I came home and wanted to rest and watch a DVD. I put it on and during the second chapter of the movie it broke and I thought, what a drag! Then, I thought of the work you suggested that I do: "the circumstances are given and you have to be loyal to yourself, be loyal". It was 11 at night and I was surprised to find myself thinking this: if I need to rest, more than see a movie, then it is better that I go to bed...A second later I thought, isn't it true that my father's illness was given as a tenderness to me. I has already decided to go to Ireland (I wanted to go for work, but also to get away from this serious situation), but my father's situation, for good of bad, obliged me to a concrete work, to move, to beg, to ask and ask again. The test to this was that I found myself more mature, not crushed by the situation. I was able to look, more than anything I was able to look. The next day I had to see a group of people that I really didn't want to see, and I was trying to figure out how I could get out of the situation, then the recognition of the previous evening came to mind. I thought: if it is true that the circumstances are for me, that they are God's tenderness towards me, even this situation can be so. I found myself united with those people and we had a beautiful experience. So, what is it that I have understood? That this work that you speak about is not automatic: you didn't tell me to get to the point of saying Jesus. From the methodological point of view, it was fundamental for me that you left me free, that is, that you said, "Look, you must go to the depths of this verification". It was just a matter of doing it. The test that this experience was true was during the summer, which for the sake of time I will not say, but even this summer there were many very difficult moments for me, and I would love to list them all, but what struck me was that I was there in those situations, and was able to look at them, look at them with the same freedom and tenderness, and as a result am happy.

We begin from discomfort, whatever situation we find ourselves in. Again Hadjadj said, "I have the intuition that our anguish is our treasure". Replace anguish with discomfort, with circumstances: put anything there and it is our treasure: "it can tear us to pieces in an upward cry. On the other hand, the origin of our anguish cannot come at the same time as death and as that of the heavens. It is the pressure from heaven that makes us hope for a happiness that is greater than the world's and which allows us to experience this world in its extreme precariousness...Man, in his tragic condition, is greater than the superhuman crammed with goods, and as a result, drugged". Again, here we have someone who is not afraid of the discomfort brought about by circumstances. On the contrary, it is what sends us to another and there one begins, when they aren't afraid to set out on the journey, to begins to look. We need to identify what every circumstance allows us to look at, what newness it asks us to look at, otherwise, if we aren't aware of what it allows us to look at, the day after tomorrow we'll be stuck again.

The question is an open one.

I want to start with an experience that happened to me here, an hour ago. I want to speak of this as it was the most striking of the evening. I arrived here tired after a day of work and

one thing struck me: someone had decided to put music on: amazing. The music being played was redirecting me, it was putting me in another position in regards to my work and the things of the day. What an intelligent thing to begin this gesture in such a way! At the same time, however, I wasn't able to really hear it well due to the fact that a lot of us were busy sharing and chatting. I was thinking: this is an experience in action—I am proposing that you listen to this music and you, instead, you think that you are having an experience because you are talking about your experience, but in reality you are wasting an experience. The Mystery is here: you are here with all of the weight of work, things that you want to say, and the Mystery is speaking to you, saying something to you. I want to follow it because it is greater than all of the beautiful experiences I have had, that I am having and that I want to talk about. This launches me into an experience of embracing the other, as my wife I am doing, as we are in front of the Mystery, not wanting to control the outcome of this work, or to compare it with that of the younger folks. I don't know how this problems will be resolved, but I trust the Mystery because I know that it is for good, and thus I'm here, and I think this is an experience.

Why is this an experience; why do you say that it is an experience?

Mainly because it is given by something outside of me, it has this characteristic. I am one of those who organize the world, but this thing is outside of me, it has the strong sign that it is not the fruit of my labor.

Why do we have an experience? Why is what he is saying an experience? If we are not able to give reason as to why it is an experience, our I will not grow; I will not have made a judgment.

Something happened to me this summer which I am now understanding. Towards the end of July I was at a friend's house and I asked him about a personal situation and he told me, "In any case, Christ is everything". It was a beautiful phrase, but it wasn't yet mine. Then, towards the end of August something very painful happened in my life, something very upsetting and as soon as they told me, the first thing that came to mind, without even thinking of my friend, was: In any case, Christ is everything. This means that I have recognized the relationship that makes me and that allows me to look at things without being crushed by them. I don't know how this will end up, but I know that I have a relationship with the one who makes me, that make me in every second and that saves me.

Excuse me a second. If you said that when you first heard this phrase it was not yours, you can't say—without telling me why—that two months later it become yours. We can't tease each other. You weren't against that phrase, you accepted it, but you just said, "it wasn't mine". So, why did the phrase become yours? What happened? In other words, on what basis can you say that that phrase is true? Is it true because you affirm it now, with your will, with your energy, but not as the result of an experience? I don't know if I am making sense. Because we have the phrase there, ready to go, why do we need to take the path? If we leave the path full of holes, this time you might make it, but tomorrow life will crush you for some reason, and if you haven't taken the path you will be left there cornered. Like someone told me this afternoon, "For years I repeated the things I was told, like a parrot". It's not that one says these things without all good intentions and without the desire to say that they are his,

but they are not his. At a certain point she said, “Then, everything crumbled and nothing was left”. For this reason we need to help each other, otherwise, after years of getting together and being in the movement we will say to ourselves: I didn’t follow a human path. I understand all too well as I said at the Beginning Day, because at a certain point I knew that I had to learn what I thought I knew. For this reason we need to give ourselves only one rule: you can’t say a word unless you can give a reason for what you are saying. This loyalty to ourselves is enough to make this journey. At a certain point, I could no longer stand to say things without understanding the experience behind them, you see? Why did I start to love to judge? Because when I was worried, when something happened that left me perplexed, when I would become anxious, what was I aware of? That I was different before and after I judged. Imagine a girl who erred and is worried that she is pregnant. What gives her certainty? Counsel? “Don’t worry, it’s not a big deal”... You can give her all of the counsel in the world, but until she gets the test results (“No, you are not pregnant”) she is not at peace. Everything else is a series of clumsy attempts, one after another, attempting to quiet her anxiety. A moment later she begins again. If one does not understand how they gain personally on this path, then why should they take it? It would be stupid, we should all leave. But, when one begins to foresee what they personally gain in doing what Fr. Giusanni says, that judging becomes the beginning of freedom; then one cannot simply repeat phrases, but wants to know what they are saying, know what experience is behind an experience like this. Just like in the example of the girl that is worried that she is pregnant; you become aware that all of the advice is not able to give you a shadow of certainty of a judgment. This allows for the building of a certainty, one brick after another. But if we don’t do this, as I was told this afternoon, everything falls apart because we say many things but at a certain point we can’t do it any more. Do you know what I mean? For this reason, you have to look now to see if you have had an experience, what has it begun in you: before I didn’t feel like it was mine, but now it feels like it was mine.

I want to tell you about something that happened this summer. Before leaving for vacation with some families my wife and I were really angry with another family, and we left for the vacation angry and we were angry for the first week. All of our friends insisted that we begin again with this family and we didn’t do it. At a certain point the majority of our friends left and that afternoon, when everyone had gone, I felt a great emptiness and said to myself: even if those that I was angry with were to come to my house crying and were to tell me why we were arguing, would that fill up this nostalgia, this emptiness that I have? From that point it was He that was present and my gaze changed; I had an incredible tenderness for those who two hours previously I would not even have spoken to. I decided to write them a note, telling them what happened.

What made your gaze change?

The fact that I was sincere with my desires; looking at that melancholy, that nostalgia that I had had, I was too certain that the experience that I had was for the great desire that I have; what I was able to do was couldn’t fulfill my need for reason. Thus, I asked Him, and he changed my gaze.

Thank you.

Can I finish, as the best part comes later. I wrote them a note telling them of the path that I had taken and thanked them also for this anger, as it was an occasion to discover His tenderness. I gave the family this note and after two seconds he came to me, moved, and hugged me. But the thing that struck me the most, even the days that followed, was that every time I am in contact with this family and we talk (people I could not talk to before), my heart explodes because the only reason why we talk is because He is a presence; every time I get in contact with them it is a celebration and I get choked up.

This is a beautiful example of the opposite of what we often do. Often we wait for our feelings to change and then begin a dialogue with the other, but instead, the point is changing a judgment on another, changing one's gaze; this changes our feelings. If he would have waited until his feelings changed he would have been angry the entire vacation, and besides wasting the vacation he wouldn't have resolved the question. This is the importance of what Fr. Giussani teaches us; he offers us a path in which, using reason in a correct way, even when we are stuck, we can immediately verify a change. Not as a defeat because we need to be "good" Christian, no. The gaze changes because it does not correspond; I need only be loyal to the needs that I feel within me, that I experience within me (the need for truth, for goodness, for complete fulfillment); for one's feelings to change.

You said at Beginning Day, "There is no experience until you recognize God as the ultimate implication." At that moment it occurred to me, "But I'm already doing this; I already recognize Him, and it even comes easy to me." But my problem is that often I can't answer the question, "Why do certain things happen to me?"

And this shows that you didn't understand this phrase.

In fact, I understood it later.

You see? We repeat a phrase we think we understand. And how do we see, a moment later, that we didn't understand it? Because we react like this, and this means we didn't understand it.

Then what happened to me is that I went to school Monday and I heard the news that the father of one of my students had died, and I had to go into class and explain Leopardi. At that moment I thought, "What do you say now?" Because I had to tell the news to the kids. A second later I said, "So what are you trying to tell me?" And I had no urge to tack anything on, but was full of the desire to discover. So I realized that when experience happens, as you were defining it (judgment is saying You) – and this is me who was saying "I already know it" – first of all you don't want to tack anything on, and second you get down on your knees. In fact, I realized that I entered the classroom and the first one to have a question about that fact was me: "What are you trying to tell me?" And I asked them this question, to make it their own; it was an amazing class. But truly, the consequence – that amazing class – impressed me less than what I just said: look at what judging means!

The point, as you see, is that we start being able to say, "Look at what this means!" But not as something extrinsic to experience, but because something happens where we see the existential import of these words. Being aware of an event, we said this summer; you know, you understand the import, the density of those words, the density of what we are saying right when it happens, and then it truly becomes my own. And the sign of this? The change, the change that happens. Today we saw how judgment happens at the same time: judgment

comes forth and something happens right away (rage is defeated; confusion is defeated). So if we don't start to see the way this fits our humanity, who can make it happen? By way of witness, I'll read you a letter that a friend sent me: "I joined the movement thirty years ago and I had the good fortune of meeting Enzo; incredible years when my dedication to him and to the movement was important, but, as I see now, not complete. Today I realize that it was always enough to be there, to bask in that Presence and so to give so much energy and time. But the I, as you are saying, is not engaged in verifying Him, and therefore, even having such a witness, I grew more and more sick of giving over the years, to the point of quitting. Thank God I never abandoned the movement, in part because what had happened to me had been so big that I couldn't deny it; but I was confused and stuck; I didn't know any more how to start over. I spent years looking for a way for me, expecting my fulfillment to come basically from work. I was able to improve my financial standing, but I couldn't fill the emptiness that came back in a little while, to the point that a lot of unpleasanties happened in my life, and at that point I understood that I couldn't keep on battling and forcing reality; and in the awareness of my need I started to ask my friends for help. Then the event happened all over again because I began to recognize in those friends the very same features that Enzo had, the same things that in Enzo had brought me back to Jesus." As Father Giussani used to say, not "how" it had happened, but "what" had happened. He goes on, "That gladness and that passion for the ideal had made my heartstrings sing and this put the I back in motion." We know He is present not because we say the name of Christ – it's often said in an empty, formal, pious way – or because we say particular words, like "friendship": we can see that He is present because this happens, and the I is put back in motion. "Starting the next day, I began to look at things in a new way, and this left me serene, attentive to what was happening, grateful for what had happened, and from that evening on the certainty of having this kind of companionship for my life swept away any ambiguity about the promise of good destiny; it changed my attitude in front of things. When I thought of work I wasn't enraged anymore; I wasn't worried about my financial situation anymore. The anxiety and false claims of my life had disappeared. I was seeing circumstances as opportunity, and relationships blossomed. It really is true that Christ makes all things new. I am becoming aware of an extraordinary newness in ordinary things: what used to crush me now leaves me tired but glad, and what I used to complain about I now sing about, to the point of crying out, You, finally You. Jesus has brought what He started to completion. Now, thanks the event that happens again, I am like a child; I'm discovering everything, and the things I'm reading in the booklet of the International Assembly of the Responsibles are like windows opening wide to the morning sun. Understanding judgment not as an analysis of what I went through or as a feeling that stays with you to the end, but as the immediate recoil of the awareness that He is present, is something out of this world." We know that Christ is present because He puts the I in motion, and allows me to recognize Him. This is a challenge that fills everything with meaning, and you are finally free. In fact, it continually increases the desire for His presence: these are the absolutely unmistakable marks of something real, because this happens to the one who has a real experience. I conclude by reading another letter, where, with great simplicity, a friend relates how she used to go to her mother-in-law's house every Saturday and prepare something to eat. She was always bothered by this: "So is the reason so many people are here because I'm always the one doing the cooking?" But all of a sudden the memory came back, the memory of Him; and a person can see this circumstance as something that, through the discomfort you experience, sends you beyond: "Last Saturday

the same thing was going on again, and I was feeling the same initial annoyance, but suddenly the memory of Jesus came up. That circumstance was asking me to recognize Him in what was going on, mundane in itself, and in my mother-in-law's face, who was calling me with that clear and strong-minded tone of voice, and I had to decide: do I stay prone to annoyance, or do I recognize the reality that is transparent to me: so that I can see Him." Then she tells about another episode having to do with her son, where another radical question arose: "Who entrusted my son to me?" And do you know what I am experiencing? A gladness inside the struggle and the certainty that nothing will be lost. It is a challenge! Sometimes hard, sometimes tender. There is an endless verification that needs to be done within every factor of my life and within every decision I make. It is a necessary challenge, allowing me to say, 'I am You-who-make-me.'" But this is what is born, what pushes forth from the stuff of life, from life in its most mundane aspects. This is the promise that lies behind everything mundane, because through what is mundane Someone is calling us; the point is whether or not we accept this call and know how to recognize in the mundane not only a sentimental feeling (I like it, I don't like it), but whether or not we reach the judgment to be able to recognize that Someone is there; and whether or not opening myself to this possibility truly changes my way of living. This is the promise each one of us.

Glory be