

# SELF AWARENESS: THE REAWAKENING POINT

by Julián Carrón

Notes from the Assembly with the Responsibles of Communion and Liberation in Italy  
Pacengo di Lazise (Verona, Italy), March 4, 2012

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**W**hat help we would receive every morning for facing the difficulties and challenges before us, if we brought all our “I,” all our need, all the awareness of the drama, whatever it may be, to the prayer the Church has just had us recite in Sunday Lauds! It would already be the first victory over our disorientation, whatever kind it may be: “God is for us a refuge and strength,/a helper close at hand, in time of distress;/so we shall not fear though the earth should rock,/though the mountains fall into the depths of the sea,/even though its waters rage and foam,/even though the mountains be shaken by its waves. [...] The waters of a river give joy to God’s city,/the holy place where the Most High dwells./God is within, it cannot be shaken;/God will help it at the dawning of the day. [...] The Lord of hosts is with us;/the God of Jacob is our stronghold” (*Psalms* 46).

What an experience a person must live, in order to say this! It is not that she is spared something of life, or that she does not see everything tremble, but what amazing consistence this awareness gives life, to be able to challenge everything with this certainty: “God is for us a refuge and strength....”

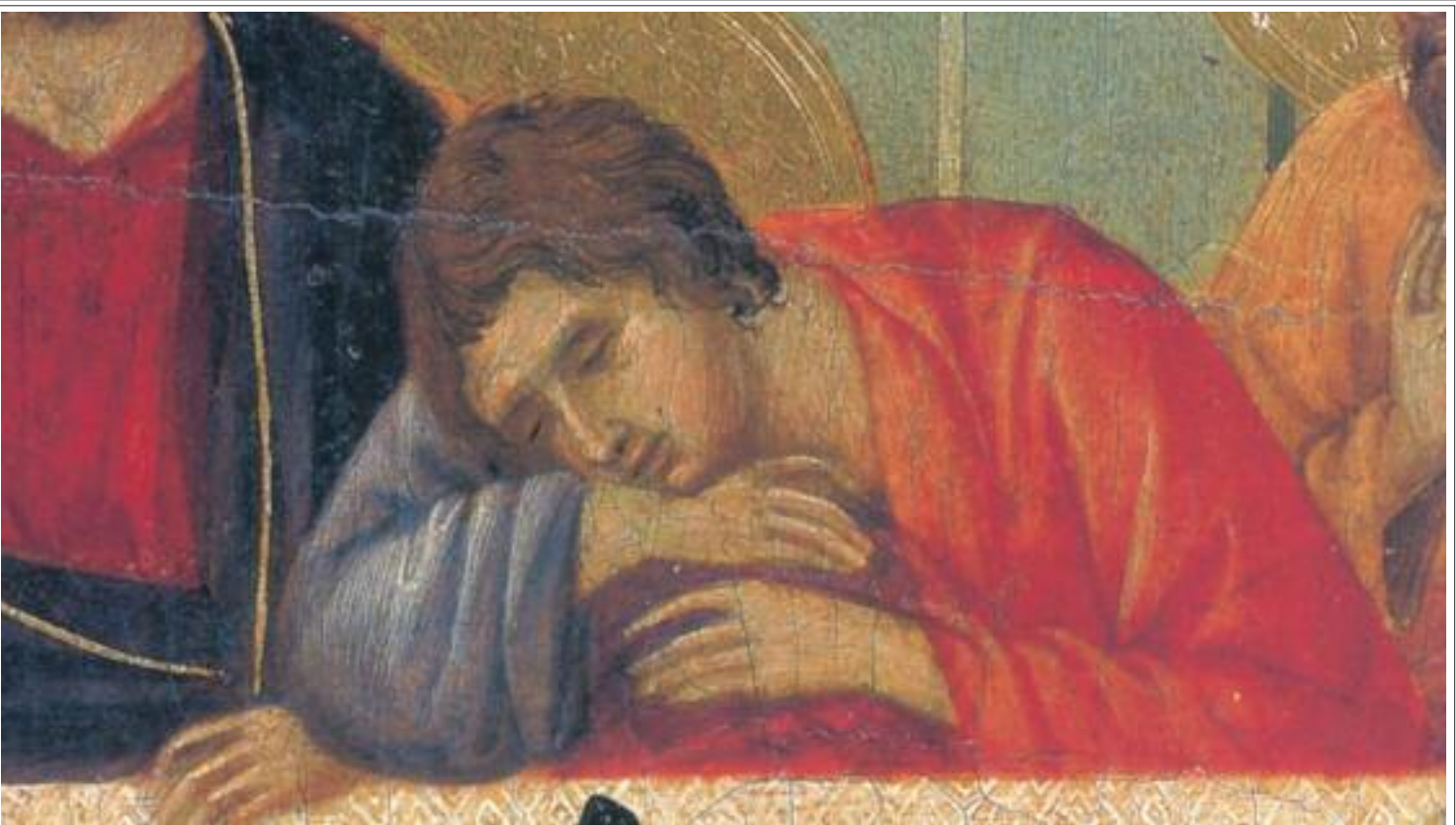
It is the same thing that Fr. Giussani describes in a text that I recently found by chance: “When in fact the grip of a hostile society tightens around us to the point of threatening the vivacity of our expression and when a cultural and social hegemony tends to penetrate the heart, stirring up our already natural uncertainties....” Before continuing, I would like to know how we would finish the sentence; before a similar situation, what would we appeal to, what would come to mind, where would we identify the consistence, where would we find help? Again, Fr. Giussani amazes us: when this happens, “then *the time of the person has come*” (L. Giussani, “È venuto il tempo della persona” [“The Time of the Person Has Come”], edited by L. Cioni, *Litterae Communionis CL*, No. 1, 1977, p. 11). What is the person? Where is his/her substance? “What pushes so that the person exists, so that the human subject has vigor in this situation in which everything is ripped from the trunk to make dry leaves of it, is *self-awareness*, a clear and loving perception of self, charged with awareness of one’s destiny and thus capable of true affection for self, freed from the instinctive obtuseness of self love. If we lose this identity, nothing is of help to us” (*Ibid.*, p. 12).

Fr. Giussani explains how this self awareness emerges: “We find the law of self awareness, analogously, within the

psychological experience of man: one acknowledges and loves one’s own identity acknowledging and loving n ‘other.’ In the psychological history of a person, the source of the capacity for affection is a person so acknowledged as to be embraced and welcomed. For the child, this presence is the mother, so much so that if she is absent, the wellspring of affection remains dry. But, at a certain point, this natural sign no longer suffices, because the subject has evolved toward youth and becomes snarled up and shows the characteristics of the absence of affection—in confused, bewildered, disordered, and pretentious youth, the moment of the true, permanent Other [with a capital O] has come, of which one is constituted, of the inexorable and faceless, the ineffable [mysterious] presence. Youth is the time of the You [with a capital Y] in which the heart sinks... as into an abyss; it is the time of God.” So then, it is the content of this self awareness that gives our presence substance, our person substance.

**What is the content** of this self awareness, what was the content of the self awareness of the psalmist? This presence of the You is the presence “that must be acknowledged, embraced, and loved; otherwise identity disappears.... It is in youth that the dramatic force of life arises; [because] the dramatic force of life consists in the battle between the claimed affirmation of self as the criterion of the dynamic of living and the acknowledgment of this mysterious and penetrating Presence.” For this reason, “the phenomenon that enables the personality to express itself is initiative.” What type of initiative? “The initiative that documents the beginning of a true Christian identity... the desire of the memory of Christ, the desire of the awareness of Him, of His presence” (*Ibid.*). This is the battle needed among us, in us, in each of us: whether we place our consistence in something created by us, in an ultimate affirmation of ourselves, of an image of ours, of a project of ours, of an attempt of ours, with all its insubstantiality, or in the acknowledgment of this Presence. There are no alternatives, and the more life goes forward, the more one decides, the more one finds oneself in one position or the other.

“Having the courage to affirm that the fundamental problem is that of making habitual the desire of His remembrance [of His memory], the awareness of His Presence, cannot but reach us as a demand for something abstract [how he hits the mark!], that is added to or over-



laid on problems felt to be more pressing and concrete.” In fact, herein lies our resistance. For this reason, “the desire for memory of Christ matures as a story in us, grows, not automatically, but as our capacity grows, following someone.” And just as “we cannot possess the project of our maturity,” similarly, “we cannot ourselves choose the maestro; we must only acknowledge him. The Lord has given us a maestro to follow; the Lord has placed him on the road He has placed us on, on the road we are travelling. Choosing the maestro ourselves would mean choosing someone convenient, choosing someone who responds to our taste, our desire to see our project affirmed. Following means identifying with the criteria of the maestro, with his values, with what he communicates to us, not binding ourselves to the person who in and of himself is ephemeral. In this *sequela*, the *sequela* of Christ is hidden and lives. Not the attachment to the person, but the *sequela* of Christ is the reason for *sequela* among us. The friendship among us must tend toward this nature of being a maestro” concludes Fr. Giussani, “because a true friend is one who, with discretion and respect, helps the other toward her or his destiny” (*Ibid.*).

**This is the decision** that each of us must make, and the request to open the cause for beatification of Fr. Giussani is a new, decisive opportunity that challenges us in the present: do we want to follow this, do we want to follow what Fr. Giussani proposed to us, are we open to what we have just heard, that is, to make a journey in which we, following him, identify with his criteria? Because when

we see this happen, in the attempt we are making, we observe—as documented so clearly yesterday—the emergence of a new subject who becomes a presence. All of yesterday—the two assemblies—was the documentation of this presence according to the different ways it appeared in the many people who spoke and in the dialogues among us and with those who were not able to get up to the microphone. Why? Why this richness of presence? Only because of the certainty of what Fr. Giussani just said, which for many people has become increasingly more the self awareness that enables them to stay in reality freely, free of the circumstances and in the circumstances; not outside the circumstances, but in the environments, free from attachments (because the only thing that did not appear yesterday was the heaviness from the accusations; there were hardly any signs of this); thus, free from dependence on the powers that be, whatever their modality of expression. I am amazed that this certainty does not coincide with and does not depend on having power in hand, because the Lord can choose not to give it. The history of the people of Israel is very beautiful from this point of view, because in antiquity the divinity and power were so linked that when a people lost power this also marked the end of the divinity, except in one case: the people of Israel. The God of Israel can permit that His people be defeated, can send them into exile and still continue being their God. The God of Israel and the substance of the people are not bound to any power. Rather, God can allow the loss to purify the people, as the prophets say, so that Israel may acquire its substance independently of >>

» any historical event, because God wants to generate a creature, a subject that is so new, with such a substance, that no matter what the evolutions of history, it can remain, because it is grounded on a rock. What is this rock? What is the content of this self awareness that becomes rock, if not Him? Not only did God not spare His people: He did not even spare His own Son. He can wound the shepherd and let the sheep disperse, but only to gather them back, for the definitive victory of Christ. Therefore, I understand well why Fr. Giussani says that in this moment the time of the person has come. In fact, he asks each of us, you, me: where is your substance? Upon what is it grounded? If we are not free of the circumstances, we are part of the problem, not of the solution.

Instead, we see that precisely in this point in the winding road of history in which many are lost, we can be a presence—even limping, with all our limitations, which we know all too well—that many acknowledge and turn to, as happened for the people of Israel, when people wanted to just touch the hem of His mantle, to walk with Him, not because Israel had any power, but because it had what makes it possible to live life. Precisely a presence like this, dependent on nothing but Him, makes us open to need, as we have seen, whatever its nature, be it that of future teachers or someone who has lost his job, who has no hope, or who is living through a crisis. This demonstrates the nature of the need we see around us, that even reaches the point of a need for hope to continue living. Thus, only in living this experience can we find an answer to our need, and thus offer society a response to the need of others, that is, a place where nothingness is vanquished, a companionship that is true companionship, a friendship that is true friendship toward destiny.

**Only a community like this** leaves a mark in history, as Fr. Giussani said. When “the reality of faith suffuses man” it suffuses “all the expressions of his personal reality,... in the sense that it suffuses the totality of the person, thus changes the subject” (L. Giussani, “La fede è chiarezza, coerenza e (anche) grazia” [“Faith is Clarity, Coherence and (Also) Grace”], interview edited by F. Dante, *La nostra assemblea*, Comunità di S. Egidio [Community of St. Egidio], Numbers 9 and 10, January 1978), and thus defines the action of this subject in history. This is the first challenge, the drama before which each of us stands.

“In the second place, lived faith, and therefore an ecclesial communionality, lived where the person lives, in the environment... because the environment for us is the

reality of life of the person inasmuch as it is suffused and involved and tentatively utilized for its own purposes by the social powers that be.... A lived communionality in one’s own environment realizes a presence that, if it is real, a lived presence, cannot help but perceive itself, feel itself, and want itself immersed in the problems that constitute the fabric of life of the environment, because a human environment is interwoven with problems. In this sense, there is an inevitable political impact achieved by the pure presence of a Christian fact, or also of a Christian person.” Fr. Giussani continues, “I often say that communionality is a dimension of a person, not necessarily an aggregation *hic et nunc* of individuals.... Communionality, if it is dimension of the person, is essential to the Christian presence wherever the person may be; therefore if she is alone she will live this awareness as aspect and context of the way of perceiving herself and her own responsibility; if there are others, she will express this communionality in the fraternal unity with them” (*Ibid.*), but those

who live this awareness have communion within their own self consciousness, and express this communion as awareness of self.

Therefore, when we live this self awareness in reality, in the environment, as we saw in yesterday’s contributions, we become a factor of social life, and this is the level that is our duty, that is the duty of the Christian community, that is, us as presence of the Movement in reality. Then, there is “in the strictest sense, a political one... the attempt to imagine, to achieve social structures, structures of coexistence that are more just, that better express the human.” To this political

level in the strict sense corresponds the responsibility of the individual who decides as a vocation to enter into politics. “Our task [that of the Christian community] is to form people to the faith, through a life of lived communionality that... cannot fail to also engage in the problems of the environment” (*Ibid.*).

Returning home after these days, after what we have seen, with this awareness, is what will make us increasingly more present, to the degree to which self awareness will grow, that is, the power of the person from within a belonging to Christ in the Church, in the Movement. As Fr. Giussani says, with the growth of the self awareness that is grounded on the one foundation that endures against any circumstance, we acquire that substance that enables us to stay in reality.

Our friendship is the help to grow in this self awareness, because without this we will be unable to make any contribution, and will end up overwhelmed by the torrent of confusion, with or without power in our hands. **I**

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