



Religious Awareness in Modern Man

Notes on Christianity and Culture
in the Works of Luigi Giussani, Founder of Communion and Liberation

Four Talks by Luca Grillo
Columbia University, Earl Hall, New York, NY

April 9, 2007 - Christianity at the Crossroads of Greek Reason and Jewish Tradition

Simmonds: Good evening, and welcome to our lecture on "Christianity at the Crossroads of Greek Reason and Jewish Tradition," organized by Crossroads New York Cultural Center. Tonight's lecture is the first in a series of four inspired by a seminal work of Msgr. Luigi Giussani's, titled *Religious Awareness in Modern Man*, which was first published in English a few years ago in the international theological magazine *Communio*. In this book, Fr. Giussani, whom some of you may know as the founder of the Communion and Liberation movement in the Catholic Church, offered a very lucid discussion on why some of the most important Christian words have become almost incomprehensible to modern culture. I quote from the Introduction to the book:

“The Religious Awareness of Modern Man” attempts, first of all, to identify in today's cultural and social situation those aspects that hamper an authentic religious awareness. Furthermore, it tries to outline what Christianity's attitude is in front of this fact. We live in a time in which what is called Christianity appears to be something both known and forgotten. Known because it has left so many traces in the history and education of peoples. Nevertheless forgotten, because the content of its message seems to be hardly relevant to the lives of most people.

In the book, Fr. Giussani traces the historical development that has led to our current situation. He identifies the root of the problem in rationalism, the tendency of modern western culture to reduce the scope of reason to its most abstract faculties. In his view, Western reason has progressively become atrophied and unable to recognize reality in its fullness. In particular, it is unable to recognize that reality presents itself to us as a sign pointing to an overarching Mystery, to which reason tends but can never exhaust. This theme of the "reduction of reason" has been brought up recently by Benedict XVI in his monumental Regensburg address, in which he called upon western culture to again "broaden" reason, in order to overcome the current separation between faith and reason, faith and culture. The Regensburg speech was a major motivation for this lecture series, especially because the Pope's main concern did not get any coverage in the press and was very much obscured by the controversy about the nature of Islam. I should add that Crossroads, which finds its inspiration in the teachings of Fr. Giussani, regards this theme of the relationship between faith and culture as the very heart of our mission as a cultural center.

In order to explore these important questions, Crossroads has invited an outstanding speaker. Luca Grillo is currently a doctoral candidate in Classics at Princeton University, but only a few years ago he was a student of the late Fr. Giussani himself at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, Italy. There he completed two of Fr. Giussani's courses, and was granted degrees in literature and philosophy. Mr. Grillo later received his Masters degree in Classical and Medieval studies at the University of Minnesota. It is a pleasure to welcome him here tonight.

Grillo: Thank you, Rita, and thank you everyone for coming. I'll start with a funny story. Hephestus, the smith of the gods, has a terrible feeling. He's afraid that his wife, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, may be cheating on him with Ares, the god of war, and so he decides to recur to his cunning arts and thanks to his device, he builds little, very subtle, invisible chains which are like a trap, and he puts this trap around the bed in the chamber. And of course, Ares meets Aphrodite and they end up going to sleep together, and then all of a sudden the device shuts them in. At this point Hephestus got what he wanted, the proof of his worst suspicions. He calls all the gods into the room and he points at what's going on saying, "Look at this! My wife is cheating on me with Ares. It's unfair!" And the gods laugh, of course. And at the peak of the scene, Apollo sarcastically remarks to his friend who is not less sarcastic, Hermes, the messenger of the gods. He says, "Well, it's not such a bad punishment to end up trapped in bed with Aphrodite!" And everyone laughs and the story is over.

When we read this today as Homer tells the story, we are probably a little bit shocked. What are we talking about? Who are these gods? And it would be shocking also to find similar stories with very similar immoral behavior are told from different cultures all over around the Mediterranean Sea. But there is one big difference which is peculiarly Greek in this story and it's the fact that Greeks pretty soon came to criticize this story and to criticize these gods. And they said, "Well, this is mythology. This cannot be. This is not true, and these are not the real gods we believe in."

A couple of centuries after Homer, a philosopher called Xenophanes commented, probably thinking about the scene I started with, in this way, "Homer [who told the story] and Hesiod attributed to the gods everything which is shameful and blameworthy. They told of unacceptable stories of every possible misdeed of the gods like to steal, to sleep around, and to cheat." This judgment comes from within the Greek culture from a completely different point of view and this is the point of view which was brought forth from philosophy, and this would also be the first point that I would like to address in my talk. I will divide it into two different parts: The first part is meant to document a statement that Rita mentioned in the Regensburg address of Benedict XVI which is the following (it comes from that speech). He speaks about "the encounter between the faith of the Bible and the search of the Greeks as decisive for the birth and the spreading of Christianity." So the first part of my lecture will be an attempt to illustrate this encounter as fundamental for the formation and the spreading of Christianity. In the second part, I will talk about the profound harmony between what is Greek, in the best sense of the work, and the Biblical understanding of faith in God. There are of course differences, but there are also similarities, to quote Pope Benedict, "the profound harmony." And on this basis, on these pillars, Christianity was born. I would like to show these two trajectories of Jewish and Greek tradition, and to see how they came to an encounter.

First, the Greeks. The Greeks and their philosophy means their search, their rational search for meaning, if you will, for what constitutes everything in reality, or to put it another way, as they did—search for the origin, for God. You may know that philosophy was started from the passion that different people had around the seventh-sixth century B.C. for discovering the *arche*. The *arche* means the beginning, the origin. So they were fascinated by the possibility of realizing what came before, what was at the origin. These *arche* they called God. *Arche* is not only before in chronological terms, but it's also the substance from which everything is made, so really, in a word it's God—the consistency, the ultimate matter of everything, of reality.

There was an interesting coherence, again to put it with Pope Benedict, in the whole universe of reason. Reason was the main tool that everyone as a human being is given in order to attempt the fascinating adventure of knowledge, of discovering, of understanding reality, of understanding different things, of understanding myself, of looking for the meaning and searching for this God and the *arche*.

If you look at the early philosophers, and also people who came a little afterwards like Plato and Aristotle, it's striking to see how many completely different interests they had and how many disciplines they started and somehow founded. They were interested in biology, they were interested in psychology, they were interested in politics, oratory, history, philosophy; they were interested in metaphysics. What do all these areas have in common? The discovery of *Logos*, reason—this powerful energy everyone is given to search and to engage in reality. Different aspects of reality suggest different methods to the same tool—logos, reason.

But there is more. The Greeks pretty soon realized that there are different aspects, and different aspects found different disciplines. But there is also sort of a hierarchical order. One thing is to discover something about biology or mathematics or physics. One thing more compelling and more urgent is to discover the meaning of your life, or to discover God. And so they put an order on the different sciences naming and claiming metaphysics, which means “what goes beyond what is physical,” as the queen of all the sciences, which is the origin of theology, the search for God.

There is an interesting statement, and there's an interesting conclusion to this development and this trajectory—that different philosophers designed in their attempt to discover the origin, God, and the meaning of everything, and it could be somehow disappointing because the Greeks came to realize that there's nothing we've been given better than reason to attempt this inquiry, but, alas, reason may realize and surrender in its noble attempt, may realize that the very God which by nature I want to search for might be bigger, and I could come upon the realization that the very reason that drags me and pulls me towards the discovery of the great mystery is small and it's not big enough to contain this mystery. For the Greeks, to step over the border of what was allowed to human beings was the worst possible sin. It was called *hybris*. If you are a human being, do not dare conceive thoughts or attempt actions which are possible, permitted only to the gods. A lot of Greek tragedy plays on this very contrast—this attempt to reach and to embrace this infinite God and arche, and the fact that the tool that's been given seems to fall short of the task.

One of the greatest philosophers ever in the history of humanity, Plato, puts what I'm saying in the following way. And I have to say that this quote became known and dear to me because when I was a student in college, an undergraduate, Fr. Giussani used to quote it a lot. It goes like this (It's towards the end of the *Phaedo*):

I think, Socrates, as perhaps you do yourself, that it is either impossible or very difficult to acquire clear knowledge about these matters [the meaning of life] in this life. And yet he is a weakling who does not test in every way what is said about them and persevere until he is worn out by studying them on every side. [It's hard, it's uncertain, but you cannot give up. You must try.] For he must do one of two things; either he must learn or discover the truth about these matters, or if that is impossible, he must take whatever human doctrine is best and hardest to disprove and, embarking upon it as upon a raft, sail upon it through life in the midst of dangers, unless he can sail...[“unless”—not only two possibilities; maybe there is a third one.]...unless he can sail upon some stronger vessel, some divine revelation, and make his voyage more safely and securely

Four hundred years before Christianity - the announcement that God came - , prophetically in a way, and maybe almost nostalgically, Plato conceived of the possibility that in this search to reach and to grasp and to understand God, God might actually have pity on human beings and He Himself might come to rescue us from this hard task.

There is this incredible awareness that there is nothing more precious and more useful that we are given than reason, as I said, but reason, as I said, might not be enough.

In the funeral oration in the year 429, after the first year of the hostilities between Athens and Sparta, the most prominent statesman of the time, Pericles, was chosen democratically by the citizens to deliver the oration, to praise the ones who fell during the first season of the war. He transformed this oration in an occasion to praise the greatness and the value of Athens to its full. And instead of being an occasion of mourning, it became an occasion of incredible pride, also in a healthy sense. Basically he said, “It is true; they died, but look, what did they die for? What was the ideal that they held until the end of their life?” Which is like saying, what is the country they gave their life for? And he responds, he says, “Who are we?” There are two little phrases which always strike me. One thing he says, “philokaloumen,” which means, “we love beauty.” So it’s the idea of reason as the complete openness to a reality and the capability to recognize what it’s built for, what it’s worth is. And the other thing that he says is, “philosophoumen,”—we love philosophy – meaning, we love reason. We will engage in reality banking on our reason.

But there is a problem. Pericles is clearly talking to Athenians and for Athenians. What he’s saying is limited, almost opposed to everyone else. It’s true for the Athenians, actually, only for free males, born of Athenian parents. It’s what makes Athenians different from everyone else.

There is a passage which Benedict, in the Regensburg address, underlines as very important, which is the passage of Hellenism which is the time when Greek philosophy crossed the borders of Athens, and pervaded the whole of Greece, and through Greece pervaded the Roman Empire, and through the Roman Empire basically pervaded the whole Mediterranean Sea. And all of the sudden logos, reason, this instrument and this tool that we’ve been given for this search became a characteristic and a property of every person, so much so that based on the categories of Greek philosophy I can say that for each of us in this room, even if I never met you before, I know for a fact, by the very fact that we are human beings, I know for a fact that you, your heart, the way you are is this thirst for beauty, and that you want justice and you want truth and you want meaning for your life. Why? Why is it true for you? And why is it true for me? How can I say that? Greek philosophers responded to this question, and responded using their reason. And I can say also that we all have the ultimate desire that Plato had. And if there were other possibilities in my daily struggles, as I’m looking to be happy in a simple way, and if the other possibility is that the happiness that I’m running after may come and reach me, Plato before Christ, and us today have the same passion. This, through this Hellenization of these ideas and conceptions which were born and limited to Athens, came to spread out and also to meet a good part and the best part of the Jewish tradition.

In the second part of my fist point, I will speak briefly, very briefly of the Jewish tradition. And I would like to underline a couple of characteristics of the God of the Bible. I will use examples which are probably already well known to you. I will just recall them to your attention.

The first characteristic that I think pops out on pretty much every page reading the Bible, the Old Testament, is that God is absolute, is infinite, is this ultimate mystery. You cannot even almost mention God. And even Moses used to veil his face when he met God because no one can see God. We can say that God is somehow transcendent. He is up there. But God is also present. God chose a people and He decided to become part of their history. And this people, as we all know, are the Hebrew people, the Jewish people. And the very characteristic of this people, what makes them different from everyone else is that they have this covenant, the covenant that God established with them.

It's interesting because if God is infinite and absolute but present, to read the Bible many times from my point of view, from my perception as a human being, a God which is absolute but a God that is present manifests Himself as a scandal. My reason recognizes Him, but He's so much bigger that it scandalizes me. It's great. I like it personally to read the Bible catching these very human reactions to God's interventions in human history.

Let me mention a few examples. Isn't it unfair, we would say, using purely human categories, to ask Abraham, who waited many long years to have a son and in the end who had a son, to ask him to sacrifice him? And Abraham probably had this hard dialogue with his wife Sarah, but he was the loyal servant of God and so he picked up his son and he went up the mountain and he laid him down on the altar and God stopped his hand. Nonetheless, what does it mean? It's almost as if God is inviting him to stretch his reason. Even if it sounds crazy to you, that's what I'm asking you. And at the end there is the great mercy; He stopped his hand.

Another example, again very well known. Isn't it crazy, again unfair, that He chose for a leader to guide the people out of the captivity of Egypt, Moses? Moses, as we know, stuttered. He couldn't speak straight. "And n-n-now I have to go t-t-to Pha-Pha-Pha Pharoh. And I have to talk!" And for the ancient people, the way you talk is the way you present yourself. And He picked Moses. Every time God intervenes it's like He's inviting His people to acknowledge that their strength is in Him.

A couple more examples, taken this time, because it's the same God and the same trajectory, taken from Christian history. We are used to hearing these stories as nice stories. We don't think about it anymore, but sorry, wait a minute! Isn't it a scandal, literally a scandal, to decide to enter again into human history by getting a teenager pregnant? This is what God did, and once again, if you stop a moment and you think about it, it's unfair. You don't do that! Or isn't it, once again, unfair, you could say, or a scandal for human measure to decide to save the world by putting your son on the cross? We just went through Easter. What does it mean? These are just little examples from the point of view of our experience of God that God is present, He gets involved with our life, but it remains somehow unintelligible, even if when I have an experience of Him, it's more. I cannot put God into a box, and my very reason that drives me to know Him has taught me that once I meet Him, it's more.

The second characteristic is that there is this incredible loyalty of God within the covenant. Another incredible thing that I always like to catch when I read the Bible is that the loyalty is God's loyalty. We as human beings break the covenant continuously. What keeps the covenant going—and for Christians it's pretty much the same—is the fact that God is loyal and God keeps it and God re-establishes this relationship and confirms His choice.

If we put together what we were saying about the Greeks looking for this mystery, and realizing that reason could be shared (because we all have the same *logos*), and, on the other hand, the Jewish people, the Hebrew people who had this covenant with God, we could start understanding how two different paths sort of met in the middle and how the very reason that moved the Greeks became the tool for recognizing as openness “*philokaloumen*”—we love beauty, we are struck by reality, became the tool to recognize and understand this *arche* that the Greeks were looking for and that reached the people of the Bible.

And now I’m moving to my second point. I’m going to touch on the profound harmony between what is Greek in the best sense of the word and the Biblical understanding of faith in God.

First, this God is a God that is transcendent, it’s true, but that not only can but wants to be searched for and recognized by human reason. It’s true for the Greeks so much so that philosophy makes sense. It’s true for the people of the Bible, and it’s true for the Christians. It is true that God is more, and it could be perceived by my experience, by my narrow categories, as a scandal. But my reason, God wants to be recognized by my reason. Think how many times later in the Gospel Jesus said, “You still don’t understand! You still don’t understand!” And the relationship between the God of the Bible and the Hebrew people is the same.

I remember in college one of the drawings that Giussani used to make to help us was the following. So I’ll do the same. He was saying, imagine a big playing field, and imagine in this field different people, single people, or different teams, groups of people trying each one by himself, or by themselves, to build a huge bridge to the stars, like a poetic image for a huge bridge to the mystery, to our God. Can I establish a connection with this God, this unknown mystery that I’m looking for? And imagine that they’re all trying and everyone is using his or her or their skills as best they can. Probably in this example we have to say that the best ones who are trying to build this bridge were the Greeks because they relied on the best tool which is reason. And they could say something about this God and about the ways to possibly reach Him better than anyone else. These are the Greeks. So they were trying from the plain on the land to reach, as other people did, like this big “X”, this big mystery. What happened, on the other hand, is that this mystery became involved with certain people, and these people were the people of the covenant, the people of the Bible. Christianity, we could say, was met and was born at the crossroads, at the point of the encounter between this attempt to reach God and God becoming involved in human history.

This is true in different ways. It’s true in this sense and it’s true also, very simply, for time and space. When did God decide to enter, to become incarnate in human history? In a precise moment. 2007 years ago. When the Greek culture, thanks also to the Roman Empire, was dominating all over the Empire, which means that this understanding and this drive of reason was particularly clear and evident. And everyone was trying to adopt the same categories to use the same tool to discover the same thing—the *arche*, God.

Where did it happen? What was the place where God chose to keep his covenant and fulfill His revelation becoming involved with human beings? It was Palestine which was part of the Roman Empire and certainly part of the Greek culture, again thanks to the Roman Empire that spread it. So, from the point of view of the trajectory of Greek thought, from the point of view of God becoming involved with history, from the point of view of time and space, literally Christianity was born of this foundation.

Let me give, as a sort of an introduction, and then we will develop this in the next lecture which is actually the birth of Christianity on these pillars, let me show you how the early Christians were aware of this dynamic that I've been mentioning. Christianity was founded upon these two pillars: Greek thought and the history of the covenant. The very first line, it's very famous and also very beautiful—the very first line of the Gospel of John goes like this: “En arche en ho logos,” which means, “In the beginning [en arche] there was the logos,” *verbum*, the Latins will translate, which is reason, or which is God. It's not very clear at the beginning what he's actually talking about. But then the good news comes. The logos—*ho logos sarx egeneto*—“the logos became flesh.” It's the incarnation.

It's interesting to look at the vocabulary because this line paraphrases the first line of the Bible, so connecting the Gospel of John and the beginning of Christianity to the beginning of the Bible. The first line of the Bible is “In the beginning was God.” God now is called “logos” which is like saying it's a God that can be known and searched for according to the categories and the foundations of Greek philosophy. And then there is the other great news that this God, according to the history of the covenant, kept getting involved with His people, and He became flesh.

Another little curious thing, I read toward the beginning the quote from Plato saying that there are two possibilities—find your way or stick with the best. Oops! Maybe there's also a secret dream, a third possibility – that God Himself may come. The expression of Plato when he says that we could rely on a divine revelation is “*tinis logos*,” so literally Christianity was like the fulfillment of the secret desire of the Greeks and the fulfillment of the history of the covenant that characterizes and drives like a thread all over through the Bible. Thank you.

April 16, 2007- The Rise of Christianity and the Foundation of Western Culture

Simmonds: Good evening, and welcome to our lecture on "The Rise of Christianity and the Foundation of Western Culture" organized by Crossroads New York Cultural Center and Columbia Campus Ministry. Tonight's lecture is the second in a series of four inspired by a seminal work of Msgr. Luigi Giussani's, titled *Religious Awareness in Modern Man*, which was first published in English a few years ago in the international theological magazine *Communio* and you can find now at the Crossroads table. In this article, Fr. Giussani offers a very lucid discussion on why some of the most important Christian words have become almost incomprehensible to modern culture.

He also traces the historical development that has led to our current situation, identifying the root of the problem in rationalism, the tendency of modern western culture to reduce the scope of reason to its most abstract faculties. This theme of the "reduction of reason" has been brought up recently by Benedict XVI in his monumental Regensburg address, in which he called upon western culture to again "broaden" reason, in order to overcome the current separation between faith and reason, faith and culture. The Regensburg speech was a major motivation for this lecture series, especially because the Pope's main concern did not get any coverage in the press and was very much obscured by the controversy about the nature of Islam.

In order to explore these important questions, Crossroads has invited Luca Grillo who is currently a doctoral candidate in Classics at Princeton University, but only a few years ago he was a student of the late Fr. Giussani himself at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, Italy. There he completed two of Fr. Giussani's courses, and was granted degrees in literature and philosophy. Mr. Grillo later received his Masters degree in Classical and Medieval studies at the University of Minnesota. It is a pleasure to again welcome him here tonight.

Grillo: Thank you. Good evening. Thank you for being here again tonight. I'll make a couple of very short premises and then we can tackle the theme of today which is not less rich and interesting than the one we had last week.

First, I would like to briefly summarize what we said in the first lecture. The first lecture was talking about the birth of Christianity at the crossroads of Greek tradition and Jewish tradition, and we could say that Christianity has a claim to constitute the fulfillment of the deepest Greek desire which is the desire that reason might encounter and know the ultimate mystery, the meaning of everything, and, on the other hand, the encounter with the Jewish culture and civilization which is characterized by the fact that these are the people that God chose, and these are the people that God chose to enter into history. I drew on the board what Fr. Giussani used to draw to explain this point to us. Imagine, in a big field, the human attempt to reach God. We could try different ways, and we were saying that the best way would be to rely upon our reason, the tool we've been given to discover and to explore reality. The best at this adventure were the Greeks. And thanks to people like Plato and Aristotle they moved pretty far; they discovered a lot about human beings, about reality, and about God. We could say that their attempt to reach the mystery was like moving up. On the other hand, a completely different method, but dealing with the same issues, is the one we find in Jewish history and tradition—God entered into history; God engaged Himself with some people and chose a precise people. We could represent this as not the human attempt from earth to reach God, but as the choice and decision of God to reach down. "X" would be the

mystery. Christianity, historically, in terms of time and space, and in terms of mental categories, happens at the crossroads where these two cultures meet. This is, in a nutshell, the content of the previous lecture.

The lecture of today will talk about the rise of Christianity, so the nature and the characteristics of Christianity, and then Christianity in its effect and impact on western culture. So the lecture is naturally divided into two main parts.

I will start talking about three effects that characterized and still characterize Christianity as such. We might wonder, if Jesus was a Jew and all the disciples He chose were Jews, and Christianity was physically and also as mental categories born within Judaism, how is it that at a certain point there was a split? How is it that we, the followers of Jesus, the Christians, the followers of Jesus, are not necessarily Jewish? This is due to a slow development that we can trace in three main steps. The first, I would like to tell you the story—it's a story from the Acts of the Apostles. A young, zealous and educated Pharisee was talking with his old rabbi, an old, wise man, a member of the Sanhedrin, a member of the group of the ones who just a few years previous decided to participate and take part, with the Romans, in the execution of Jesus. And the young, zealous and intelligent guy was saying, "I feel very uneasy. There is something wrong going on here because I, a real Jew, in the name of Judaism I catch myself participating in the persecution of other Jews, and this I don't like. It's true they are followers of this Jesus; it's true they are heretics, but something makes me unsatisfied with this." And the old man whose name is in the Acts of the Apostles and also other documents, Gamaliel, responded, and he said, "Leave them alone." He was talking about the small community of Christians in Jerusalem. "Leave them alone, because there are two possibilities: Maybe it's all made up and maybe this new sect is a work of human hands. If that's the case, they'll die out. Don't even bother persecuting them; they'll finish. But, the second possibility, if they are from God, no matter how hard you persecute, you will not succeed and you might find yourself at war with God." It's amazing to read this document written in the First Century AD today and to think of the wisdom of this old guy—If they are from God, they will never perish, no matter how hard the common mentality or the persecution might go against them. The young, zealous Pharisee who was receiving this advice from Gamaliel was called Saul, and later he will convert to Christianity and will take the name "Paul." It's St. Paul.

St. Paul, because of his education and because of his passion and because of his character and personality was one of the many leaders of Christianity, and was one of the first who understood that if, as we said the last time, the *Logos* was made flesh, if the *Verbum*, if God became a man, this must be the response for every human being. He was very Greek in this sense. He realized that if God became a man, this is what everyone, by the very fact that we have reason and that we love reality, this is what everyone is looking for; therefore, Christianity must be announced to everyone. God came for everyone—this God, the God, the *Logos* incarnated. It's interesting because Paul took his passion and his ideal to spread Christianity very seriously, and he engaged in four different journeys in four different places, actually more than four, in different places following different routes in the Mediterranean Sea, and he ended up in Rome. We could talk for a long time about Paul and his journeys. But one of the experiences he had over and over again going around is that he realized that people coming from a Hellenistic or Roman or Greek mentality were more open, were at first more welcoming of the message that he was proclaiming while, on the other hand, many times starting (since he was a Jew) from the synagogue of different places, he met a strong opposition and a strong rejection. This became part of his certainty that the time was ripe for Christianity to be announced to everyone, and Paul played, as I said, a big part in the understanding that the Pope is trying to recall to us as he did in Regensburg. The Greek categories—Christianity is not another invention of another group, but is God who corresponds to human beings. The same God who created us came to rescue us and to fulfill our search.

The second episode is the time that when, for the first time in history Christians were called “Christians.” Where did we get this name from? Of course, from Christ, but where did it start? It started apparently, it’s pretty certain, in Antioch. Antioch was a very big city—the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It was like the Chicago of the Roman Empire of the time. They were alive as a culture center. They were alive for trade and the exchange of ideas where there was a community of Jews who got there because of the Diaspora. What happened in Antioch was that Paul also happened to go there together with Barnabas, and they started a little community. First they addressed, as was their custom, the Jewish people, and some people got interested and some people kept meeting, and then they opened it up to the others, the gentiles, the non-Jews, or later the non-Christians. What happened there? People were completely puzzled looking at this group from the outside. Who are these people? There were probably 30, 40, not more than 50 people, maybe like us in this room at this moment. Who are these people? It’s weird. What puts them together? Some of them, half, are Jewish; some of them, half, are Greeks. What brings them together? With a sort of despise they started calling them...there’s only one thing that brings them together, this “Christ” they worship, and they started calling them, almost to make fun of them, *Christianos*, “the Christians.” Wherever they come from, what they care for, and what they follow is Christ. They are Christians. We kind of liked it and we kept this name. Still today what brings us together probably is the fact that we care or maybe we are curious about this Christ.

The third episode which was a big step in the development of the identity of Christianity is of course the Council of Jerusalem which was held in Jerusalem in the year 50, about 20 years after Christ was put to death and Christ rose. People in Jerusalem were wondering, what’s going on? This situation that we see in Antioch is actually being reproduced everywhere. Everywhere Paul, Mark, Peter, Barnabas, the other disciples go, little, very little communities of different people start. But there was something that was hard for these people to accept which was the fact that again Jews, Gentiles and Greeks gathered together. And people started saying, “Wait a minute! If Jesus was a Jew and he never denied the law, if Mary, his mother, was Jewish, if the disciples he chose were Jewish, we cannot admit other people. Better, we can admit other people only upon the fulfillment of one condition, that they become Jewish. The issue of circumcision became one of the biggest issues of early Christianity. You realize that the problem underneath is a major one; it’s like saying, is there a pre-condition for encountering Christ? Or to put it another way, did Christ actually come for everyone? Or to put it another way, which is the same, is Christ the *logos* incarnated? Sure he’s the fulfillment of the path and the engagement of the Jewish trajectory, as we said, but is he also the fulfillment of the path that the Greeks followed? The *logos* that everyone, by the very fact that he’s a human being, is looking for? Paul played a major, major role in the decision to not require circumcision for the Christians. Again, it’s not simply about a rule; it’s an understanding of the event and the novelty that Christianity was in the world that was winning the day. Peter himself, the first pope, at first was really undecided. And there are, if you read, for example, Galatians, there are moments when Peter and Paul had real disagreements. We must make an effort today, and actually we should try to walk in these people’s shoes and realize that they were persecuted by their authorities, they were persecuted by the police—the Romans, and all of a sudden they were looking at themselves, born and raised as Jews, and now the one guy we followed, the one guy who fascinated us and corresponded to our heart, is this becoming something else? It was a shock.

So within these two great traditions, there was also a great novelty. There was something which was new and peculiar to Christianity. And these three passages that I tried to sketch, the awareness of St. Paul, the fact that they started to realize that Christians are the ones who follow Christ, no matter where they come from, and the Council of Jerusalem, when they ruled about this, were main, key steps towards the development of the Church.

In the second part of my first part, if I can put it this way, I would like to underline what is Greek, what is Jewish, and also what is completely original and not Greek and not Jewish in Christianity. Going back again to the first lecture—the engagement of God with humanity—the incarnation, the fulfillment of the covenant—the

covenant is being kept, mysteriously. Again with the same good dose of scandal when human experience bumps into something which reason seeks but cannot contain, like the mystery of God, this is, in a way, a continuity with the Jewish tradition. The perception of God as the universal, meaning He works for everyone. Universal *logos* is instead Greek.

What is not Greek and not Jewish? What is instead completely new, and actually it was hard for these people to accept? A couple of things: The first, the death of Jesus on the cross. Scandal, as Paul says, for the Jew, and craziness for the pagans. What?! You are proclaiming to me a god that human beings put on a cross?! This was the reaction of Greeks and Romans.

Very recently, about 20 years ago, they found in the Roman forum, which was downtown Rome, where all the main buildings were, an inscription carved on marble, and the inscription goes like this: There is a guy called Alexamenos (sounds like the name of maybe a slave, a poor guy), and he's in the act of kneeling down and looking up, and then he says, "Alexamenos worships his god." Great. And then if you keep looking at the inscription you see a cross and on the cross there is a guy, but the guy on the cross has the head of a donkey. It's like to say, "How stupid this Alexamenos! Can't you pick a better god than one who dies on the cross?" It was a scandal as you might imagine also for the Jew to think that the Messiah, long awaited, came and was executed by human beings including people of the Sanhedrin themselves.

The other thing which is completely new and completely original and hard to accept is the second part of the story, the good one, which is the resurrection. The resurrection is not Greek, is not Roman. Once you are dead, believe me, that's it! Enjoy your life! This was very much the Greco-Roman attitude. When, you might recall, Acts 17, Paul, during his third journey went to Athens, the great capital of philosophy, and the big philosophers, probably in a snobby way said, "Ha! Ha! Let's hear this guy. He has a funny accent." And they called him and they said, "So tell us about this new doctrine." They were the smart ones. Probably they were trying to trap him. And they listened to him, and Paul maybe was getting excited, I don't know, and at a certain point he mentioned the resurrection, and the philosophers started laughing. "This is a good one!" And then they said, "Thank you. We will listen to you some other time." And they left. It was so foreign to their mentality. It was foreign also to the mentality of the Jews. It's interesting if you listen to the readings this week after Easter. If you think of the reactions of the apostles, you might think that people who were pretty well trained in expecting something great and exceptional from that one guy, right? They saw a great deal of miracles. When the women announced the resurrection to the disciples, they did not believe them. I don't think they were acting like, Ha, ha, ha! Let's try to get them! What a good joke this is! Probably they were pretty serious; they did not believe them. And then you can tell the stories of the resurrection as they are in the Gospels, it's always Christ, the risen Christ, going and re-choosing, and going to re-grasp one by one his own because they were so lost. The idea of the resurrection was completely foreign also from the point of view of the Jewish mentality.

To me, this that I'm telling you is somehow also proof, maybe not a scientific proof, but it's also proof of the historicity of the resurrection. They could not possibly come up with anything like this 2000 years ago. We, today, because of Christianity, are much more familiar with the idea. The name "resurrection" kind of means something. At that time it was just, I don't believe it. I start laughing. So Christianity was born at the crossroads, but it brings into existence in the history of humanity, it brings something which was completely unheard of—a God who is caring enough to die for his people, a God who is put to death by his people, a man who rises from the dead.

Now, in the second part of my lecture, (we will be happy to go back to this previous section maybe later in the questions), I would like to address and to briefly sketch the main constituent factors which Christianity brought into western civilization. One of the big claims that Rita mentioned again, the Regensburg address by Benedict

XVI, one of the main points he makes is that western culture, which means our culture, is based on Christianity. He pushes his claim even farther. He says, “The betrayal of Christianity is somehow a betrayal of the pillars and the foundation of our cultural identity.” I would like to address, first to show, to point out, first some main values which are very dear to us as western people, not to us as Christians. I’m pretty sure that if we jump out of this room and we go on the street and we ask people, they would feel strongly about some values which came into history through and thanks to Christianity. The five main values which I want to address are clearly chosen and explained by Fr. Giussani himself, and I found them on the Web site of Communion and Liberation, www.clonline.org, and it’s interesting because this is a response that he gave in a talk that he gave here in New York. He came in the 80s. I guess it was 86; I could be off by a couple of years. And someone asked, “What are the main values that Christianity contributed to western civilization?” And he answered off the top of his head, these five. I will mention them; I will try to explain them as he did, and then I would invite you to maybe go and check it out.

First, the infinite, un-debatable value of the person, the person as such. Think about modern America. Would we like, during a debate, someone telling someone else, “Oh, shut up! You’re a woman.”? Whoa! Don’t go there! Or you can also say it to someone from another race. We would just say, “Are you crazy?” It would not be, even rhetorically, a very good way to go about your argument. I’m not saying this is the reason, but we have inside our bones the understanding and the certainty that every single person has an infinite value as such. Before I look at your sex, before I look at your race, before I look at your bank account, you have a value which is infinite. Maybe I am preaching to the choir, and that’s exactly the point. You say, “Whoa, thank you. We kind of knew that.” That’s exactly the point. This is the result of Christianity. What we don’t think about, though, is the many times that it was not this way, and still today, in some places, it’s not this way. For Romans there were different categories in their books of the law. If you are a free-born male, there are different sanctions than if you are a slave. If you were a slave, until the time of Christ, and even after, your master had the right over your life and death, pretty much like...of course people would say, “Come on, don’t be too cruel to your slave.” But like today people would say, “Oh, come on, you cannot kick your dog.” It would not be such a bad crime as to kill another person. Sorry for the example, but it was not always this way. The infinite value of the person as such came into our culture, our mentality, with Christianity. Think about it.

The second is the value and the importance (again it’s great to think about how this flourished in our countries and in our civilization) of work. Work means to engage reality and to shape it according to your ideal and according to your function. In the Medieval cathedrals, God was often portrayed in paintings or especially in sculptures as the eternal worker. And therefore work is like somehow participating in this mysterious process of the creation of something good, something positive. Work is not only a hard course imposed upon human beings; it’s the possibility to express yourself. Think about the mentality of many of the monks and the nuns in the middle ages. They literally transformed Europe teaching people the beauty and the passion and the potential of work. It’s something we feel strongly about today. We kind of think that our work somehow defines us, not only to measure us, but, “Hi, my name is Whatever and this is what I do.” This again is Christian.

The third is the importance and the value of matter, especially of the human body. There is nothing more anti-historical and wrong theologically than to treat Christianity as a spiritual religion, to reduce Christianity to a sort of New Age set of beliefs. For Christians, by the very fact that we believe in the resurrection of ourselves, with our body, the way we are—we believe we were chosen and created a certain way, the way we are, we might like it or not, but that’s the way it is—it gives to the corporal factor of the human being an incredible dignity. How many times did Christ talk about the body as the temple of the spirit? It’s this incredible unit. Again it was not like this before, and in some places still today it’s not like this.

I don't want to diverge, but personally I was horrified when no more than two weeks ago I was in Manhattan very close to Pier 17 and I saw this exhibit which apparently has been very successful which is called "Bodies." Apparently there's a certain guy who went to China and got some bodies of human beings, and he set them to expose them to show how the human body works, to show different bones and muscles and organs and so on. And what is different about this exhibit is they're not models, but they're human beings. I don't know the way you react, but when I heard this I was disturbed and shocked. I think that it's not only because I'm Christian. I think it's a natural reaction of coming from the very culture and mentality I was born into, I think. It means that the paganization of our culture has really come a long way.

The fourth value that Giussani brings up is the value of progress. The end of life and the end of history will be the final revelation of the mystery of God. So time is positive. We are not as human persons singularly, or as humanity, we are not walking towards the edge, and then we fall and that's it. We are somehow walking towards the final salvation and fulfillment. This, as a mentality, brings to the individual an incredible energy toward progress. This can become an illusion. This can become the illusion that progress will solve all my problems, so I will fix it myself. (I will talk about this in the next two lectures.) But the idea that time develops towards something somehow positive is very Christian. If you look at different people at the time of Jesus, or if you look at different mentalities now, there is not this understanding. It's not by chance that many of the greatest scientific discoveries have been made in western culture and western countries. It's not because we are the best, or it's not because we are the smartest, but there is, as an assumption, a certain positivity in the idea of moving knowledge or moving humanity one step forward. Other possible understandings of history are, for example, the cyclical understanding—history is like a big cycle. People have different numbers of years, and once you get to a certain point, like the Golden Age, you will fall down again, and then you will go up, but there is no final goal to reach and therefore, even as you enjoy running toward the Golden Age, you already know that it's going to go down. It's like the economy. Progress, therefore, is hindered at the very root.

The last value that is big for us and comes with Christianity and because of Christianity is freedom, the possibility to be free, to be who you are, to choose what you want, to express the way you are. Freedom is very dear to us and we would not like, again if we think about a debate, anyone imposing anything unfair on anyone's freedom. Again, in the next two lectures we will see how even this value can become somehow crazy, and even this positive new foundation could somehow, if it's not properly understood, betray the dream that it raises in human beings. Freedom was not like that at the time of Jesus. The way we understand freedom is completely different. And freedom still now is not the same in many countries in many simple, elementary ways including voting.

It's great when we think that the pillars and the things we are proud of in our culture and mentality are so completely and deeply Christian.

In the last part of my lecture, I would like to talk about two institutions that again are completely normal and typical for our life and our cities and our nations which did not exist and they are, again, a Christian invention. Let me start with a silly example. Let's imagine that because of a new possibility coming up with your job, you think seriously about moving. It's not an easy decision. New York is such a great place and I love it here, but it's clearly an offer that I must seriously consider. And so I am going to live in whatever city in another state somewhere out there. I'm not really certain, but you know, it's for a few years and maybe I'll come back. I'm debating and talking with my wife or with my husband and trying to test my children, and it's not an easy decision. And then I decide and I say to my family, "Let's go and check it out." I don't want to make a decision based on the Internet, just because they say it's a great city. I want to go there. What would be, I believe for all of us, a couple of aspects of this whatever city we would consider that we would seriously look at? Let me keep my silly example. It's a done deal. I'm leaving. There are a couple of things that could really twist your arm and

make you say, “Whoa! Maybe not! Maybe I don’t want to be there.” Let’s imagine that you are ready to go and they tell you, “Listen, I have to tell you. I know that place because I’m from there. The education for your children is miserable. Miserable! Forget about kindergarten. It’s dangerous. They don’t learn anything. It’s just miserable.” You would think twice. Education for us, schools, universities, high schools, kindergartens is in part defining a value for me and for my family, and an identity of a nation, then of a city. Cities can take pride in having good education and that would certainly factor in in the decision to move versus not to move.

Greeks and Romans did not have education like we do. It was all a private business. If you have money, you can get a tutor. If you don’t, I’m sorry. And the result was that people didn’t know how to read, didn’t know how to write, didn’t know their history and so on. They knew what they knew through orations they listened to or a few monuments, and I wonder what they got out of it. Education, the way we conceive it, with a teacher in the classroom, with a program, with colleagues, with a school, with a university, is a Christian invention. It does not come out of ancient cities. Pick an ancient city; look carefully at the map. You can find a lot of things that somehow had a similarity with our mentality. You can find temples, you can find markets, you can find libraries, public buildings, places for people to gather. You can find a lot. You will not find a building which is a school.

Where do you find a building which is a school? Where do you find a place or a program which later developed into a school? In the medieval monasteries. In the medieval monasteries there were a couple of rooms. One was called the *scriptorium*, which is the place where people write (*scribere*). And it was the place dedicated to the copying of the manuscripts. And the other was the actual school where the monks provided education for not only themselves but the people around them. It’s interesting to think about the development of modern cities as certainly coming from a lot of other things including and maybe in a big way including the little plant of a typical medieval monastery.

But there is one other thing that I want to mention which comes from the same origin which is again a Christian invention which is again big for us. There is another thing which your friend who is trying to keep you in New York could bring up. He could say, “Whoa, it’s not just education, but watch out! Before you go make sure you are in good health because the health system there is miserable! There are no hospitals, and if you find one, stay out of it.” For us, as much as education, the health system, given what we said about the value of the person, is a big part of what we look for and of what defines a city or a nation as such. How much money we spend on health! It’s a judgment. It means we value it.

On the map of ancient cities before Christianity, in the Holy Land, in the Roman Empire, in the Persian Empire, take your choice, there is no hospital. There is no hospital. There were some doctors, private practice. Go if you have the money. If you just happen to know about this one guy who takes care of this one problem which you happen to have in this moment, and cross your fingers. There is not such a thing as a hospital.

Where does the hospital come from? In a way it comes from what we were saying before—the infinite value of every person. The common mentality was, if you are sick, I better keep away from you because I don’t want to get it too, right? Who were the ones who recognized and took seriously the infinite value of each person to the point that they were willing to even risk their lives to assist others? They were the monks. It’s amazing when we read, for example, the descriptions of plagues in the ancient world because they always carried with them somehow the destruction of the humanity that comes along with the plague because all of a sudden everyone takes care of himself. I don’t want to be next to you because I don’t want to get that thing. The ones who invented the hospital or who started taking care of other people were the monks. So once again, these two defining factors of our civilization, our nation, our cities, do not come from anything else but from—it’s like an enlargement, like zooming in on the little map of the medieval monastery.

I will wrap up, and then we can go into questions. I was speaking about the rise and the foundation of Christianity at the crossroads between the Greco-Roman trajectory and the Jewish trajectory. Then I tried to sketch the development of the identity of Christianity. The one thing that I would like to stress because it was very dear to Fr. Giussani is that Christians and Jews are really coming from the same root. Giussani was very passionate about this. It's really the same God. And so, somehow, as Christians, I don't really know what it means, but a Christian somehow to have the desire to one day, since we really acknowledge the same God, since we really think that Christ is the fulfillment of the covenant he started with the Jews, maybe one day, I don't know how, we might get back together. I think it's just a good desire to have. I don't really have good images to attach to it.

In the second part, I tried to sketch some of the main values that Christianity contributed to our mentality and to our civilization as such. And in the last part, the institutions that came from the springing forth from these values. Thank you very much.

April 23, 2007: “Has Mankind Failed the Church?”

Good evening. Thank you, everyone. Thank you for waiting. I’m very impressed. I’m really sorry. I guess Rita told you there was a fire apparently. I didn’t see it from the window, but we were told there was a fire, and I spent two and a half hours on the train, the same train that got me on time two weeks ago and last week. I’m sorry, though.

I’ll give you a very brief summary of the previous lectures and then I’ll give you a summary of today’s lecture, given the time!

In the first lecture we said that Christianity was born at the Crossroads between the Jewish tradition and the God that got involved with the Jewish people, the God who chose a people to enter into history, and, on the other hand, Greek tradition, the search for God, the search of reason, of philosophy, for the Infinite, the Mystery, the ultimate God. Christianity was born at the crossroads and claimed to be, somehow, the fulfillment of both.

In the second lecture we spoke about the development of Christianity as the fulfillment of these two great trajectories and cultures, and also of Christianity as the foundation of western civilization, and we said that the values and the greatest institutions that define and that we take pride in in our culture were born out of the Christian event, out of this history.

The lecture of today and the lecture of next week, which will be the fourth and last, address two tremendous questions the way they were formulated by the British poet T.S. Eliot. Talking about the devastation of humanity and the devastation we live in, he asks two questions, the first question, which is the content of the lecture today, and the second, which is the content of the next lecture. “Has mankind abandoned the Church, or has the Church abandoned mankind?”

Today we will talk about mankind’s abandonment of the Church. What happened? If Christianity is the foundation of our western civilization, what happened? Why is it so different for us today? I will develop the lesson in two different parts. First, I would like to sketch, really briefly, the three main stages of this process of mankind abandoning the Church, mankind abandoning Christianity. In the second part I will talk about some characteristics and some consequences of this distancing and abandonment.

I have to say that the real goal of these last two lectures, today’s and next week’s, is to get you to read this booklet [*Religious Awareness in Modern Man* by Luigi Giussani], so it’s by no means an attempt to substitute your reading as much as a suggestion and an invitation for you to pick up this book and read it. It’s very logical and I believe it’s very clear, and there are some interesting quotes that document the change in chronological order that I’m going to talk about. It’s also interesting, I have to say, to think about the development and the trajectory that Giussani dictates in light of the recent and controversial Regensburg Address of Pope Benedict XVI, and I will conclude with a couple of parallel quotes to show how similar these paths are.

The first step in this distancing and abandonment of the Church on humanity’s part would take place with humanism, where around the end of the 14th or 15th Century Europe, and Italy and France were, at the time, leading countries in the culture of the time. We are at the end of the Middle Ages—a time which was characterized by a very strong and deep influence of Christianity. The ideal for people in the Middle Ages, the ideal, the dream of people in the Middle Ages was naturally to be a saint. Humanism and the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th Century is the time when this did not happen anymore, and we start seeing a certain split. How so? The dream and the ideal which was projected and proposed by the dominant culture and the common mentality was no longer the saint, but was somehow the star, which means someone who is capable of

succeeding, of standing out because of something. It's not bad, and in a way, if we look at our contemporary society, it's very much based on this. It's not bad to try to excel in something; the problem is that someone after humanism would bet his fulfillment as a human being on this success in something very partial. Think of the way it is today. We are really children of that culture. Again, when we meet each other and we go around the table for introductions, it's so easy to say, "Hi, my name is _____," and then I tell you what I'm good at. It's funny when I start a new class and I meet my new students for the semester, the very way they introduce themselves is, "Hi, my name is John, and I play football," and "My name is Sarah and I dance." It's great. And you say, "Whoa! Wonderful!" And then you think, Wow, I hope there is something bigger that defines your identity, that defines who you are. I hope you are aware that there is indeed something bigger that defines who you are.

A way to illustrate the problem of humanism I used in high school to try to get the point across to high school students, it's sort of provocative, and I will use the same with you. I used to go to class and I brought generally two pictures for that class to get them to understand the problem of humanism. The first picture which I unscrolled on the board was generally a picture of a great person, generally Mother Teresa worked really well. And I put Mother Teresa right on the board. And on the other side, right away, I unscrolled another picture which was generally a picture of a great star, it depended on the year, or on the semester. It could be a great football or basketball player, a great singer, an actor, whatever—a great star. Generally I tried to pick someone who was not the greatest moral model, and it was a pretty easy choice, I have to say. And then I addressed my students, and I said, "You guys, based on what you may know about these people—you know exactly who they are based on pretty general common sense, what you might have read in newspapers or seen on television about these people—tell me, who do you think is the best human being? Not in terms of committing less sins, but in terms of who you think would express better the fulfillment of what a human being is." They didn't like the question. But then they simply responded, "Mother Teresa." And then I said, "Who would you like to be?" They didn't like the second question either, and their response was silence. And then for a moment you could see them saying, Whoa! What is this? Where does this split inside me (because I'm talking about myself too), where does this split come from? How is it possible that with my reason I do acknowledge someone to be a great expression of a fulfilled human being, and I am sincere in the knowledge of this—I'm not lying! I do believe that someone could represent what human beings are better than what I could, or better than what someone else could, and on the other hand, what attracts me as a model, what drags my affection, so to speak, what I dream of being—it's something else. These two pictures, in a stupid example, if you want, express this split that started with humanism. What I recognize with my brain and with my reason, no longer coincides with what drags me, what attracts me. In the Middle Ages, a person like St. Francis was literally able, by the very humanity that he lived and transmitted, to drag masses. He was a popular person, much more than what we could think a popular saint could be today.

Before I move on to the next development, let me say that there is a big risk for us when we talk about saints. (Again this is from my experience of teaching high school.) This mentality of succeeding in a detail is something partial. It's so rooted in us that we end up thinking that the saint is the one guy or girl who succeeds in the pious, religious aspect of life. So if we go back to the example before and we imagine a classroom where people are introducing themselves: "Hi, I'm John and I play football." "Hi, I'm Sarah and I dance." "Hi, I am Gareth and I'm very pious." You laugh! And I'm glad you do because, first of all, everyone would look at the poor guy and say, "Whoa, couldn't you find anything else to do with your time and your talents?" This is not what a saint is. A saint is not someone who is excelling in the particular aspect of being a good guy, or of being pious. A saint is the fulfillment of a human being in his or her relationship with the God who creates him or her. This is what a saint is; therefore, a saint is not only good, but he should be fascinating like it was in the Middle Ages.

The second step (the booklet develops this in more detail) right after humanism, and I have to say born from humanism, is what Giussani identifies with the Renaissance. So we keep going about more or less a hundred years to the end of the 15th or 16th, some countries even 17th Century, this idea that what affirms you, that your fulfillment is your capability to excel in something—take your pick, it doesn't matter, just in something—generated the understanding that life must be good. If I deny God as the source of my positivity, as the source of my life, as the source of my identity, where do I get it from? Because I still exist. The general and generic response that the Renaissance gave was nature. And these people started being pantheistic—they worshiped everything. They worshiped nature. With this idea, it sounds a little bit New Age, they developed the understanding that if nature is what generates us, they didn't call it "God" anymore, if nature is good, we are naturally good. Therefore, somehow, following our instinct, following who we are, we would do good. This was the origin of great frustration and of great misunderstandings. We will get to that point. But the second aspect of the development of the Renaissance is that it starts being a little anti-God. There is the impression that not only does nature generate us, but if we are skilled, if we succeed in something, we do not really need God. The way it has been formulated is (and again, you'll find this in the booklet), if God does exist, He does not matter. I don't really know if God exists. Anyway, I don't really care because it's far away, it's distant, it does not matter. The way I live my life, the way I perform my daily tasks, the way I live my work, the way I treat the people that I love, doesn't depend, has nothing to do with God because if God exists, it does not matter. It is the de-incarnation. Didn't God, as we said in the first lecture, become flesh? Flesh means that God does matter. God does have to do with everything. He is the center and the focus of life. The Greeks understood this. The Jews believed this. Christianity was founded upon this and the recognition that this one God is Jesus Christ. And then humanism, first, and then the Renaissance lost it.

The third and last step that I want to bring up for this development is for sure the step of rationalism which matured and peaked in pre-revolutionary France, and that actually led to the revolution itself. What's the step? If nature is good, we naturally act well. What's the way to understand and to measure everything in reality, everything we come into contact with? The response is always the same. They said, "It's reason." It's a great response, but they understood it in an extremely narrow way. And the way they used the word reason sounds like the same way that the Greek philosophers used it. It has nothing to do with the way the Greek philosophers used it! Why? For them, reason became the measure of reality. Everything that does not fit my measure and my reason is not reasonable. This is an incredible restriction of reason. If you remember, I finished the first lecture reading a quote from Plato. What's the peak of reason, we said? The intuition, the secret desire that the unknown God might come, the secret desire for revelation. Therefore, reason is humble in front of the certainty that the very object I seek, I can perceive, but I cannot measure, I cannot contain, I cannot define. In other words, I cannot put God into the narrow box of my reason. Ultimately the claim of rationalism is the claim to be God, to tell God the way God should be and what God can do. I measure everything. Political Science, different sciences and different methods which are still strong in our culture come, unfortunately, from this narrow understanding of reason. How many times has it happened to you that someone told you, "Prove it to me! If you can't prove it to me, it's not true."? But wait a minute! I'm extremely certain of many things that I could not easily prove to you, but it would be a violence to tell me, "therefore it's not true." For example, (the example is from Fr. Giussani) if you ask me, "Does your mother love you?" I would say, "Yes." And I would say "yes" with certainty. But if you challenge me and say, "Well, prove it to me! There is a blackboard there. I want an equation. At the end, you have to say, 'Therefore, I proved my mother loves me.'" I wouldn't know where to start. This would be an application of this restriction of the value of reason. Whatever cannot be measured and contained, does not exist; it's not reasonable, or it's not knowable. Apply this to God. Apply this to the meaning of life. It's clearly a betrayal of the very impetus that, at first, moves reason, of the very spark that lunges reason into the great adventure of knowing and grasping reality, everything.

The consequences and the characteristics of these three different steps are, first of all, a frustrated optimism. Think about this presumptuous claim of the Renaissance: Nature generates us. Nature is good. We are good. We naturally do good. It sounds good. Think about the history of the last one hundred years humanity entered, especially after World War II, and all the terrible tragedies that ideologies generated and promoted. Humanity reached a crisis. And now what? We've convinced ourselves, excel in something, and you'll be fine. We've convinced ourselves that we don't really need God anymore and that our reason can grasp the understanding of everything. What did we produce? I challenge you to find in the history of humanity tragedies like the ones we've witnessed in the last one hundred years. Wars there've been ever since. But the big problem of ideologies is like justifying and self-feeding a mistake. Think about the tragedies promoted by Communism or by Nazism. Can we still say that humanity is naturally good? Can we still say that we can fix it, we can measure it, we don't really need God? The result of human beings trying to become God is the destruction of humanity. And what we register today is the destruction of humanity. And if you look around there could be many people who are "successful," who have "made it" according to the ideal of humanism, who excel in something, and they are, maybe, sad, and they are, maybe, (and I say this, I hope, without judgment), poor human beings. Maybe they are the best in something, yet they don't know how to relate to a person that they love. The result, I repeat, is the destruction of humanity.

There are two quotes which you will find in the booklet, in case I haven't said it enough. One is by Winston Churchill. Giussani tells this episode. After World War II, Churchill was invited by MIT, and the president of the university gave a very high and very big address to introduce him, praising the progress of the new civilization and of technology, and at the end he said, "We are not too far from the time when, thanks to science, we will be able to program and plan everything so that a new Hitler will never be born again." It sounds great, but it's like, you control, you measure, you define what every human being and every brain should think. And Churchill gave a very polite thanks, (he was a British man, after all), and then he said, "Thank you for your address and thank you for what you said. By that time, I would rather be dead." It was like a very strong statement, but to say, I don't want to live in a world where human reason can claim and succeed in measuring everything.

The second example is from another great intellectual of this last century who is also a very good historian of the history of the Church whose books are just being reprinted—Daniel Ropps. In an address in another very odd intellectual circle, a l'academie de France, he related how in the end of the *Timaeus*, which is a dialogue of Plato, Plato tells this story. (It's one of the famous myths of Plato): There was a land which was called Atlantis, which was the land of the lucky ones, the blessed, the Machairoi. People lived so happily that they forgot about the gods. Not only that, but they said that they did not need the gods anymore because they could grant happiness to themselves. It seems like Plato, twenty centuries before more or less, and it's pretty interesting what became the ideal of the civilization with the Renaissance and humanism. And the gods decided to take action. And the gods decided to blow the whole island up. And looking from afar, this happy island looked like a big mushroom of cloud, and Daniel Ropps, in telling this story which Plato tells first, concluded that with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the invention, thanks to science and technology, it looks like this dream has come true. And what was destroyed by this attempt to measure everything was not only a city, but humanity as such.

It's interesting because in the second lecture talking about the development of Christianity, we said, for example, that freedom is a great thing, and we said that progress came about with and thanks to Christianity. Look, if you deny the origin and the spring from which a value is born, look how this value can turn against itself. And something positive like a positive idea of life and time as a journey, and therefore progress, can become the rhythm for the destruction of humanity. Look around.

The second characteristic and the second consequence of this destruction of humanity and of this process of the distancing of humanity from God is the cultural sense of being lost, a cultural bewilderment. There are some quotes which Giussani puts in the booklet, and I would like to read at least a couple of them. Human beings, modern human beings, walk through life with a sense of being lost probably much more than ever before. A poet who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1951 wrote this poem. His name is Par Lagerkvist. It's page 20, in case you have the booklet.

A man unknown is my friend
 someone I do not know, a stranger far, far away.
 For him my heart is full of longing
 because He is not near me.
 Perhaps because He does not even exist?
 Who are you who fill my heart with your absence,
 who fill the whole world with your absence? (1951)

Wasn't this the original desire that moved Plato in his prophesy of Christianity four centuries before it happened? We are back to square one. We forgot about what happened and now we say, "Who are you who fill my heart with your absence?" If you remember, or maybe I didn't use this example, sorry. When Paul arrived in Athens and he announced the Resurrection, before arriving and talking to the people, he saw this little altar with an inscription carved on the altar in Greek saying, "To the unknown God". The altar had been dedicated to a god who was perceived but not known. It seems like we are going back to this, but we are filled with nostalgia. The friend I desire to meet is unknown, and I even doubt that he even exists.

The second is an incredible letter whose author you could never guess. Let me read it first and then I'll tell you who wrote it. It's on the bottom of page 22 in the booklet. If you want to read along, it's okay. It's not a test.

I feel like a man again, [It's a man writing to his beloved wife.] because I experience a great passion; and the multiplicity of things in which study and modern culture entangle us, and the skepticism by which we must be brought to criticize all the impressions, subjective and objective, are deliberately made to leave us small and weak and mournful and indecisive. But love, not for the man of Feuerbach, not for the metabolism of Moleschott, not for the proletariat, but love for the beloved, for you, this is what makes a man to be a man once again.

It's a great letter. I love it. It's so filled with humanity. It was written by Karl Marx. The one person who built this utopia and this project of communism and socialism is the one man who had to admit himself that when I really feel like a man, it's because I'm in front of you, and he's talking to his beloved wife. That is to say, it's not the great, cunning, sophisticated systems we build with our mind that can possibly save me and the rest of humanity; there is a real human being there, and that is the man who is talking in this letter.

The last quote that I would like to read because it expresses both the devastation of humanity and the nostalgia for a meaning, for consistency. It is a quote by an Italian writer who committed suicide a few years after he wrote this poem. His name is Cesare Pavese and the poem is on page 25 of the booklet. He just got a big prize for a very prestigious acknowledgment of literature in Italy and he says:

There is nothing more bitter
 than the sunrise of a day on which nothing will happen;
 There is nothing more bitter
 than uselessness...

The dragging hours
are merciless for the one who no longer waits for anything.

This could be after the great positive illusion of humanism and the Renaissance, ultimately this could be the way people look at their day in the morning, and ultimately the way people look at their life. After the illusion of becoming able to define the meaning and to measure the meaning and to manipulate the meaning, after the illusion of saying, “We don’t need God anymore,”—this is the result.

As a conclusion, and then we can move into questions, if any, I would like to just recall to your attention what I said at the beginning. The trajectory that you can find in more detail in this booklet is incredibly parallel if not really the same as the trajectory that Pope Benedict drew in his address at Regensburg. When he talks, he uses a different term, but it’s really the same cultural development. He talks about the “dehellenization of faith.” Dehellenization is like the get away from the Greeks, which means get away from the way Greeks understood reason, openness and the search for the ultimate meaning, the mystery, God. We are trying to get away from this, Christianity itself, and the consequences are like a split between faith and philosophy, and the consequences are like we think and we believe sometimes that to believe we have to give up our brain and we have to be losers. It is exactly the opposite; the more we search the way reason is given to us, with this openness, with this curiosity, with this energy to adhere to reality, the more we bump into the overwhelming presence of God. It’s interesting because the pope also draws the main stages and especially focusing on the consequences on theology. He draws, I was saying, the main stages of this process as he identifies them pretty much in the same way as Giussani. He speaks about rationalism as the reduction of reason, and his final appeal, if you remember, didn’t get a lot of credit by the press because they were busy talking about something else. The main appeal is to really stretch our reason which is like being loyal to the way we’ve been created. Our reason has been given to us by God in order to search for him, to put it like St. Augustine. Our reason is not given to us to build a little, narrowly-measured tomb for ourselves, but it’s to open ourselves to something more. Only this something more can possibly fulfill us today as 2,000 years ago. And this secret desire that moved Plato, which was announced by Christianity, was denied in the way I said, with the main consequences that I tried to sketch.

I will stop here. We can maybe start with questions because I feel bad that we started so late, and again, you’ll find more in what I think is a clear formulation in the booklet. Thank you.

Monday, April 30, 2007 - “Has the Church Failed Mankind?”

Simmonds: Good evening, and welcome to our lecture, "Has the Church Failed Mankind?" organized by Crossroads New York Cultural Center and the Columbia Campus Ministry. Tonight's lecture is the fourth and last in a series inspired by a seminal work of Msgr. Luigi Giussani's, titled *Religious Awareness in Modern Man*, which was first published in English a few years ago in the international theological magazine *Communio* and you can find now at the Crossroads table. In this article, Fr. Giussani traces the historical development that has led to our current situation, identifying the root of the problem in rationalism, the tendency of modern western culture to reduce the scope of reason to its most abstract faculties. This theme of the "reduction of reason" has been brought up recently by Benedict XVI in his Regensburg address, in which he called upon western culture to again "broaden" reason, in order to overcome the current separation between faith and reason, faith and culture. The Regensburg speech was a major motivation for this lecture series, especially because the Pope's main concern did not get any coverage in the press and was very much obscured by the controversy about the nature of Islam.

In order to explore these important questions, Crossroads has invited Luca Grillo who is currently a doctoral candidate in Classics at Princeton University, but only a few years ago he was a student of the late Fr. Giussani himself at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, Italy. It is a pleasure to again welcome him here tonight.

Grillo: Good evening everyone. Thank you. Sorry for being a little late again. I will start briefly with a short summary of the previous lectures and then I have another short premise and we can tackle the theme of today pretty much in two main parts.

Summary of the previous lectures—it's getting shorter and shorter because they're becoming more. The first, the title was "Christianity at the Crossroads of Greek Reason and Jewish Tradition," and very much in accordance, as Rita just said, with the Regensburg address where the Pope spoke about a deep encounter between the Greek search, through reason, for the ultimate mystery, the *arche*, the beginning upon which we all depend, and the engagement of this mystery with human beings through a precise people—the Jewish people. Hellenization and the Pope's call to Hellenization was the time when these two cultures broadened and they came into contact with each other. At that point in space, at that point in time, at the encounter between these two attempts to bridge the daily life of everyone with the ultimate star, we said, destiny, Christianity came as a fact—something new in history founded and based upon these two great traditions.

Lecture Number Two—Christianity brought something new, and upon Christianity much of our western civilization, as a matter of fact, was born in terms of values, in terms of things we consider worthy, in terms of everything. We were talking about big words that we still understand in a certain way because of and thanks to Christianity such as freedom, person (the value of each person), and democracy, or big institutions like schools for education, or hospitals.

Third Lecture—If this is the case, if this is true, what happened? Why is the Church, many times when we talk with people, our colleagues or the people we meet, why is the Church so distant and far away? And the two titles for the two last lectures, the one we had last Monday and the one we are going to have today, are taken from a very bitter but also provocative statement and poem from T.S. Eliot, "Has mankind abandoned the Church, or has the Church abandoned mankind?" The previous lecture was about mankind abandoning the Church. What happened? We tried to sketch the three main steps and developments of this problem as a process of falling apart and becoming distant. If we said in the Middle Ages that the saint was the model and the ideal of the person who fulfills who he or she is, with humanism, which is the first step, instead of the saint, a person

who fulfills his or her humanity, a real person, is the star—someone who succeeds in something very small and particular. Maybe you are a poor human being, but you're really good at something. That will buy you success, and people will envy the way you are. This is what humanism as a cultural operation brought about, and we can still see traces and fruits of this process around us.

The second step, right after humanism and springing out of humanism is the Renaissance, the idea that nature is good; we are made by nature and according to nature, so we are naturally good. We do not need salvation. We naturally, almost instinctively, behave well and properly. In this picture there's no real room for God, and people started saying, If God exists, it does not matter. What counts, what matters for my life are my skills, my job, my relationships, my....you name it. God is far away, distant, apart. He has nothing to say about real life where I live daily and what I do daily.

The third and last step of this process of bringing Christianity and the Christian announcement far from the people is of course rationalism which is also what Pope Benedict XVI addresses clearly in his speech. Rationalism is this claim of reason of being capable of explaining and reducing everything according to my own measure. If reason is only what I can prove, if reason is only what I can demonstrate through scientific formulas, there is so much of life which is left out including the mystery of God. If this is the case, reason and faith have nothing to do with each other. But if reason, as we learned looking at the Greeks, is this ultimate openness and search for reality, for the meaning of reality, for the origin, for the ultimate mystery, then faith is like the natural fulfillment of reason; moreover, faith can be deeply reasonable even if there are things that I cannot prove or demonstrate. This is the challenge we are dealing with.

Today, in the last lecture, we will see (this question is a bit sad and very dramatic) has the Church also abandoned humanity? Did we, as Catholics, play a part in this process of falling away from people and where they are?

I will start the theme of today with an example. In my experience teaching both in high school and in college, I run into, over and over again, these two opposite experiences. When I'm teaching or talking to my students, if I have a point that I want to get across and I use an image, and example or the language of the experience of love, all of a sudden they all lean forward in their chairs and look attentive and interested, and I can see that I have them, because what I'm talking about appeals to them and it resonates with an experience that they find within themselves. If I talk about, or I use an image or language or an example, and instead of the word "love," I throw in the word "Church," they all move back in their seats. It's the opposite. Wait a minute! They get defensive. And instead of opening them up, you have this effect of shutting them down. And I always ask, "Why? Why? Isn't what we are talking about the greatest possible thing? Didn't Christianity start as the good news, a fact, the historical announcement that the very mystery, the very God that every human being, by the very fact that we exist, is looking for—this God came!" Shouldn't it be the opposite? That when you say, "the Church," the place that claims to have this as a presence, shouldn't it open us up to say, "Whoa! This must be interesting,?" But it's the opposite. Why? What happened?

The booklet that was reprinted and that I tried to push on you really hard during the last lecture, and I will still do in this lecture, puts this as three different steps. There are three different reasons, or we could say, let's use the word, three different *reductions* of Christianity. So the way that the Pope, if we look at the Regensburg Address, and the way that Giussani respond to this question is that Christianity is not being presented in its fullness, and at the core of the matter. There are three different kinds of reductions that we get continuously. The first comes from what we can call a Protestantization of Christianity. And Giussani's very clear, and I would say also the Pope is very clear in saying that this is not an attack on Protestants. This is more of a way to take a step back and become aware of ourselves. So I'm not bringing this up to trash our Christian brothers and

sisters, but instead to say what is being changed in the delivery of the Christian message. The first thing which is the process of the Catholic Church becoming more Protestant is the reduction of the fact of Christ, of the event of Christianity to word. “Word” meaning something that you say, or the reduction of Christianity to, for example, the Gospel. What’s the problem with this in theory? And then we’ll give the existential consequences. The first problem in theory is that the announcement of Christianity (we said this in the second lecture) the beginning of John, Chapter 1, is that Logos, the Word, was made flesh, and that’s where you still today, the same method, get a chance to encounter this Word. It was made flesh; it entered into the flesh of a human being, who was called Jesus. This is the beginning and still is the method and the good announcement of Christianity. We cannot try to get rid of or put aside this flesh and go back to the pure word.

What are the existential consequences if we reduce Christianity to word? The first is subjectivism. You understand it this way; I understand it another way. It inspires you in this way, and me in this other way. I feel this way; you feel that way. If we look at history and the different processes of branching off into different denominations and sub-denominations, we see that historically this is the case. Besides, how do you argue, where is the big claim of logos and reason in this process? Again it’s subjectivism. What is the problem with subjectivism? It seems really cool because you feel like there is the subject there. You feel like you matter, you count, what you think, what you understand. Again, what you feel is what matters. So you feel alive and active. The problem is, if this is the case, as a subject alone I do not have the possibility, I do not have the power to stand up to the dominant culture. And so easily as a subject I end up absorbing, even without realizing it, the judgments, the categories, the culture that I breathe everywhere until I am sort of the same, and with time, the very way I react and the very way I feel are determined, as an effect, by the common mentality. Two examples: Think culturally how much and how deeply the general reaction of people changes about the Ten Commandments. If you run them through your mind and say, okay, don’t do this, don’t do that, and so on, you don’t need to study ancient history—go back fifteen, twenty, thirty years, you can see how different influences of the common mentality make something really really big or really really small. And we too, since we live in this world, in this society, buy into this mentality. Subjectivism does not have the strength to stand up to the general culture, and we give in before we realize it to the power, and the result is that we reduce, before we realize it, the big claim of Christianity, the big announcement, the big news, the big fact.

The other reduction which also comes from this reduction of Christianity to the word is the reduction of Christianity to moralism. Again, if the problem is to interpret a text or a word which is not in the flesh, which is not incarnated, if what I meet is a set of words and not a person, like the apostles did, there is a lot of room for moralism. So we can really discuss and debate about what is right and what is wrong, and moralism is actually even more cunning as an art. It’s like telling you up to which point it’s right, and then, oops!, you step out of it. Now you’re wrong. This is what the Romans used to call *decus*, what is proper, and from *decus* comes the word decency. I remember teaching high school and having a discussion among the teachers about the dress code. It was exactly like this. It was fun. People were coming, bringing pictures cut from newspapers, and they were saying, “This is okay, until here [points to the abdomen], but if you show two more inches of your belly, it’s not okay!” This would be the moralistic approach. I tell you the borderline. Until this is fine, but after this it’s not. This is all too often and sadly what the Church is seen for. We think about the big issues which are debated in the newspapers, and how many times do we hear someone excited about saying, “The Word was made flesh.” It’s like tugging on your arm and saying, Wait a minute! What you are looking for is a possibility existentially, or for example, all your pain and suffering has a meaning. How many times do we hear this versus the Church taking a stand on a, b, c...this is right, this is wrong, up to this point it’s “yes”. This is a reduction that the general media make and sometimes we also accept. And this is called what people from the outside see about the Church. I have to say, I’ll be honest, I myself, if it were not because the Word was made flesh in my life, if it weren’t because I myself met a person, people, I could name them, I would not be very interested in this Christianity, in the Christianity of the borderline, of “You can do this, but watch out! Not that!” Again, if this is

the case, there is not a real possibility to stand up to the general power and the common mentality because in the end, who determines what is acceptable and what is not? Again, I don't need to give you examples. Think about twenty years ago. Things that were generally easily common, not acceptable, or acceptable, and are not anymore. It changes and unless we are anchored to flesh, a life, a community, we are lost in the middle of the ocean. We can try to swim really hard, but the current is bigger and it drags us to where we don't even realize we are going. This is an image of the reduction of Christianity, coming, as I said, from the same reduction. We go back to the word, and we cut off the flesh.

The third consequence of this is that if Christianity is reduced to word, without flesh, besides subjectivism, as I said, and moralism, if it's all up to me as a subject to say what I understand, what I feel, what I want, how I interpret something, there is a big, dangerous cut with tradition. And this is a problem. It's a problem for us. It's no longer like I can really see that St. Paul or St. Peter or St. Francis or Mother Cabrini or St. Dominic or St. Clare, that these people had exactly the same experience that I'm having today; therefore, I'm really in communion with them, meaning that my life is fascinated and determined by that same Presence that dragged them along. This is the concept of tradition. The other concept of tradition which is fundamental for Christianity is that Jesus did not write a book, did not even type up his words. If Christianity was supposed to remain as a word, why didn't he (of course he also had us in mind) give us words? If we want to put everything that Jesus did in a nutshell, miracles, parables, healings, meeting people, and so on. Tell me if we cannot summarize everything written in the Gospels this way. What Jesus did afterwards was to start the Church. He picked some people; he spent time with them, and he convinced them over and over and over again (because they did not understand, because they forgot, because they were stubborn, because they didn't get it—literally how many times did Jesus say, “Are you asking me this question after what you've heard and seen?”) What he did in a nutshell is that he started the Church. He also said it pretty clearly. At the end, at the very end of the Gospel—it's very clear, for example in Matthew, Chapter 28, the conclusion, he says, “I will be with you now and forever.” Who are the “you” he was talking to? And what is the way he chose to keep his promise, which means he was talking to us—“Now and forever.” There is a value in tradition. This “you” he was talking to were his disciples, which is the beginning of the Church. And the very way he decided to keep his promise was as it happened at the beginning, “The Word was made flesh,” through the Church, through the ones who had been chosen. This is the reason why we cannot accept slipping back into this reduction of Christianity without flesh.

Notice (and I like to take this for myself as a provocation) flesh means flesh. Flesh means also that sometimes we bump into things that we don't like. It's much easier to find your way around a word because you can interpret it, reduce it, read the next sentence and not think about it. But when you bump into flesh, which means when you bump into a person, and this person is another person with a certain character, with a certain personality, with a certain history, with a certain sensitivity, and so on...but this actually was part of the deal since day one. Since day one when they met Jesus, the first comment was, “A guy from Nazareth?!” And when Jesus started performing miracles which took a while—it's much easier for us to think in retrospect—for these people, the son of the carpenter, there was this scandal of the flesh right there for these people which is the reason why, to go back to the Regensburg Address, the Pope invites us to broaden our reason to allow, to understand and to embrace something that at first seems beyond our expectation.

An example and a consequence of this cut with tradition (because I interpret, and the one who comes near me in space can interpret it in another way, and the one who came before me in time can maybe interpret it in another way—we are not necessarily one and the same—the Body of Christ) the consequence of this is again a big reduction of culture. The claim that the Church has according to the statement of Paul to “judge everything and keep what has value” was a big challenge that Paul launched to the early Church. “Judge everything.” And if you look at the way Christianity engaged itself with everything around it, it's amazing. They were not afraid. They were not afraid like Jesus was not afraid to talk with the Samaritan woman who was a prostitute. The early

Church was able, therefore, to assimilate different cultures and values without losing its identity. In the second lecture we spoke of the Council of Jerusalem which is very much aimed in this direction.

If the Church is easily, if Christianity is easily reduced to these three narrowings of Christianity that I repeat are subjectivism, moralism and tradition, what could be the “solution”? What can we do once we hear how much we forgot, or how much we reduced what we received? What can we do? The response is nothing new and that’s probably why it’s good because the response is that it’s the invitation to go back to the original fact, and I would like to give a couple of examples. First, as we said, Christianity starts as a fact. We read at the end of the first lecture and the second lecture that when John, in the first chapter of his Gospel, the beginning of the story, describes the beginning, he’s very attentive in giving us details about time and space. It’s not, “Once upon a time in a land far, far away, Jesus came.” It’s “Along the shore of the river Jordan,” which means it’s real life, it’s geography. There is a precise spot. And then we are told, (and we might wonder why, who really cares?) “It was four p.m.” It was about, what the Romans call “ninth hour.” And they don’t tell us what Jesus spoke about, what he looked like. Why? It’s the claim that we are talking about a fact, something new that entered into human history.

Another example of Christianity as a fact that resists interpretations or mere words is what happens in the Gospel, again the Gospel of John, with the excerpt on the man born blind. You know the story. It’s a real story. There is this guy who has been cured by Jesus in a way which is, let me say, a bit weird. You can see the scandal of the flesh. Who is this guy who spits on the ground and picks up some mud and puts this mud on my eyes? Come on! We think it’s a tale. It’s not! How would you react? There is a point where this man had to broaden his reason. His categories in approaching this fact were—What is going on? Don’t touch me! Why was it reasonable for him to accept this and to even follow what Jesus told him? Maybe he heard about the other healings and miracles of Jesus. He did not understand. It’s easy for us to talk about it afterwards when we know what happens. Ha! Ha! There is a good ending! But it was not yet the case for the blind man. He puts down his categories for a moment and he follows. Why? He probably had enough reasons to follow. He knew that this guy was something else. So he follows and in the end he’s healed. And the people question him. And here is an example that I would like to leave you with for Christianity as a fact. People are giving out different interpretations to explain this fact: What did he do to you? He’s a sinner. No, he’s not really the blind man. He was not really blind; he was faking it. You can read these things. Interpretations. The reductions which actually in the end kill the fact. What’s the response of this simple man? At a certain point, they go and call his parents. Remember the gospel? “What do you say? What is the deal?” And the parents say, “Whoa! We don’t want to deal with this! Ask him. He’s an adult, right?” What’s the response of the man born blind? It’s very simple. He talks about a fact, something that happened to him. There is no reduction to word. He says, “I just know that I was blind and now I can see.” Something happened that I cannot deny. This fact is the nature of the way Christianity started and the nature of the way Christianity continues today. Every other reduction is ultimately not completely human. Every other reduction is ultimately something that sooner or later will get your students to say, “Whoa! [as I said before] Do I really care? Can I really be convinced that this is what my heart is looking for?”

The second appeal that comes again through both the addresses of the Pope, not only Regensburg, and Giussani is that Christianity is totalizing. We are not talking about another hobby. We are not talking about, I play ping pong, you like cards, you like movies, and I am a Christian. Take your pick. It’s funny, but sometimes we too, I speak about myself, I can think this way, and then in the end, the way I look at my work, the way I look at my free time, the way I conceive of my money, the way I...you name it. It’s not really determined by this. Totalizing (again we don’t have to be moralistic about this) is not the sum of many different things. So it’s not about making an effort to add a little piece of my life to Christianity so today I’m a little more Christian than yesterday. In my experience these efforts are doomed to frustration. It’s more the ontological conception. I

cannot say that if God exists, it doesn't matter. But I have to say and to start from the simple truth that God is the truth of everything. I can forget about it, I can deny it, I can dislike it at times, but God is the meaning of everything.

A sentence that was made known to me by Fr. Giussani by Romano Guardini uses the analogy of love. It's like when you are in love with another person. It's not that you have the problem of creating a connection between everything you do and that person, but in everything you do, there is this ultimate meaning and this ultimate echo, and this ultimate presence within you. You bring it with you. You cannot help it. Guardini, the way he puts it says, "In the experience of a great love, everything becomes an event in its own place, in its own environment." In the experience of a great love, if we are really in love with a fact, if we really don't deny it, like the man born blind. You might be smarter than I, you might have a better theory than I, but I cannot deny that I was blind and now I see. In this experience, everything becomes an event wherever I am. Think about this man the day after. Could he forget? Did he have the problem of saying, "Oh, today I would like to be more Christian.?" This presence that changed his life was with him, was determining the way he was dealing with everything.

The last thing that I would like to talk about is the important call that Pope John Paul II and now Pope Benedict keep making about culture, how Christianity has been kicked out of culture. If you think about history, the arts, or if you think about what makes culture today, it looks like Christianity is not there. Culture is the product of what Paul said in his challenge to Christians, "Judge everything and keep what is valuable." And the big teaching of 2000 years of history is that what is valuable will reveal to you something about Christ because Christ is the truth. And so in encountering and without fear in comparing everything with anything, you will rediscover and re-conquer the truth of Christ as logos, which was the beginning—the logos incarnated.

Conclusion, very briefly, is that it all comes down, we can all boil this whole thing down by saying that so at the end we need to go back to the simple fact of Christianity. But where do I find this fact? Where can I bump into this person who healed the man born blind? If Christianity cannot be reduced to word, where is this flesh which finally corresponds to the totality of my heart? The response again is very simple. Where is this process of the promise, "I will be with you now and forever.?" Where is the incarnation kept alive? Alive! I bump into a living person. The response is very simple. It's his body which is the Church, and in fact, the other big attack and the other big consequence of the reduction to a personalistic or subjectivistic approach is that there is no Church, or there are too many separated churches. The dimension of the community is fundamental, also from the cultural point of view. It's amazing. On campus I go to daily mass at 12 noon. It's amazing for me every day when I enter this chapel where there is also the blessed sacrament in a separate place, to see these other people, and then each one goes about his own business, and then I go and teach, I go and read, and people go to class, and so on. But this very dimension of the community like you are who you are and you keep your identity and there are other people around. It's a call. A fact. It's not the case that we brought up a couple of times the word "power" or "common mentality." Whoever has the power, if they don't like the Church, one of the first and main attacks they make on the Church is to the dimension of the community. It's the Roman ditto: "Divide a tempra."—Split them apart, and they will be too fragile, and you will rule. You will have it. You will hold the power. If we look at the history of the last hundred years, and with this I conclude, and the terrible regimes that destroyed so much, one of the first attacks on the Church, still today, still in some countries today, is an attack on the Church in its dimension of the community which is the body, which is this flesh, which is what allows everyone to rediscover as a fact the totality of the Christian claim which is the fact, the great announcement, the same good news that "the Word was made flesh," and we cannot stay with the Word without flesh, without this body, without this community. Thank you.