



Fourth Annual Crossroads Cultural Center  
Advisory Board Meeting

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The American Bible Society

**Key Note Address by Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, Chairman**

**Comments on “Reality, Experience, Knowledge: the Heart of the Matter” an  
address by Msgr. Luigi Giussani  
Milan, 6/21/96**

**Welcome and introductory remarks – Angelo Sala, President of Crossroads**

Good afternoon and welcome to the Fourth Annual Crossroads Advisory Board Meeting. First of all, I would like to give a heartfelt thanks to the Chairman of the Board, Msgr. Albacete, and also to all the other distinguished members for having taken the time out of their very busy schedule to spend almost the entire day with us. And I really mean it. Besides the members from New York, some of them have come from Chicago, some from Washington and some from Baltimore. And thanks to all of you for having accepted the invitation to participate in our Advisory Board as observers: it is the first time we've opened this event to the public because, based on the experience of our past meetings, we believe that the keynote address by Msgr. Albacete and the following discussion among the Board members is something very worthwhile. Further, it provides us the opportunity to know each other better. Finally, let me thank, very warmly, the American Bible Society and our great friend Mario Paredes for the generous hospitality they've provided for today's event, as well as Alicia de Frange, whose help in organizing all of this has been invaluable.

It is with sincere surprise that all of us at Crossroads have observed how much our endeavor has grown since our first event 5 years ago. Only in the last year, we have organized 29 public events, promoted two theatrical productions, and very successfully started our activities in Chicago and Houston. Where does this “exuberant vitality” (as someone told us) come from? Not from our natural capacities or skills, nor from our hard work. It comes from a continuous education that we receive from the life of the Catholic Church as to the origin, goal, identity and purpose of what we mean by culture and cultural work. It is an education that finds one of its topical moments in occasions like today. This is why what we will always be seeking from our Advisory Board is, first and foremost, a help in being educated and, only in a second moment, help with organization, resources, or strategies. There is a “heart of the matter” behind our work and what it means to be a cultural center. This “heart of the matter” is also the title of the excerpt by Father Giussani that was distributed in preparation for today's meeting. “The heart of the matter” is also what Msgr. Albacete is going to talk about. We have no time to present our various board members. However, they are here, and we invite you to get to know them at the end, around a cup of coffee. And you will find their bios now on our website. On the technical side, at the end of Msgr. Albacete's address, there will be a 45-minute discussion and Q&A reserved only for the Advisory Board members. And now, Lorenzo Albacete.

### **Key note Address - Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, Chairman**

As Angelo was saying, usually this moment in our meetings is a moment to go to the beginning, to the point of departure. We are a cultural center, and wherever we are, we have a public face. We do things in public—public gestures—meetings, discussions, interviews, etc... Usually we have conversations with people who are not related to us in any way—people who are in the news, people who have very interesting responsibilities and jobs—because we are curious about everything. I would say that more immediately what animates all of our public gestures is curiosity, interest in what's going on. A predecessor of this cultural center, (something I've hoped we could have in the States) years ago was in Turin; it was called Solomon's Portico. (Recall that's the public place where the apostles went right after the resurrection of Christ, and they belonged to that world. That was really the Times Square, the center. And there they told the story of what had happened to them, and the Christian people began to be gathered that way.) And I used to attend. I was happy to get a gig of talking at a number of activities of Solomon's Portico. And I remember on one occasion the guest was the head of air traffic control at Malpensa Airport in Milan, and his presentation was just how it works, what do they do, what are the big problems...it was fascinating! At no time was there any kind of religious thread, or message, it was just sheer—what motivated this meeting—was entire curiosity, because it's kind of an interesting job, and so I would say that this is the first thing. We have public gestures, and then let's go back and see the point of departure. The first step back is a great curiosity. We find many, many, many things interesting, and we like to listen to people involved in these things that we're interested in. And we're interested in them, in what they do, and how they live this interesting reality.

Where does this interest come from? This is the next step back. It comes from some kind of experience of the world, of reality, the world in which we live, as interesting. The particular interest in subject number 1, for example, is itself a reflection of a broader interest in which we are interested in what exists in reality, in this world. We look at it with a certain wonder, curiosity, as I mentioned. What's behind it? What's going on? We notice existence. We are awakened to it. I remember in the thought about his death, Pope Paul VI wrote his magnificent last will and testament statement. I was furious when it came out because I was hoping to write mine that way! Now I'll just have to copy it, just put it in quotes. Anyway, in one part, and it really struck me reading it, he talked about how as he saw the end, and the end comes, it comes...the guy was a great poet, and as he saw it one of the things that impacted him the most is all the things he missed looking at...the skies, nature, children...all of that was going on, and he said, "I didn't see it; I wasn't looking at it. I had such a narrow field of interests that I was not able to escape from it." He realizes that now. He may have been able to escape now and then, but certainly not enough, and in the conviction that death was imminent, the interest missing was heightened to him, the sensibility.

So the question is again we are interested because we find reality interesting. In fact, reality is that which interests us. If it doesn't produce any interest, it's not real. We've come to that conclusion. It doesn't exist. If you're not interested in something, it doesn't exist for you. So the interest is a measure of how open one is to reality, to what exists, and there we run into the first interesting confrontation, if you wish, and that is that we have discovered, those of us whose interest in reality has been awakened, that we are in a cultural atmosphere that moves in the opposite direction, that sustains itself by diminishing the scope of the interesting, by eliminating things, and by helping us concentrate only on

certain particulars. You may wonder, well, that's quite an accusation. Is it not the opposite? Are we not living in a cultural situation whose banner is openness, not restriction? Indeed that is its banner, but for reasons to be examined later, we have come to see that this is false. This openness does not exist. It is a cover-up for restriction, for diminishment, and we are suffering from that, and it grows, and to the degree that it grows, the field of interest narrows more and more, and things become serious, we have a serious problem with that.

If I were to just stop now at this point, in a sense I would have said enough. If all that we get from this meeting is this, (I'm talking now to the Advisory Board. These other people don't exist, I guess. I'm not interested!) if we get that we can recognize and say "yes" to this proposal that what is real is interesting, and the fact that we live in a culture that diminishes the field of the interesting, and therefore distorts the real, that alone would be a great achievement. I find myself that I have to keep coming back to that again and again and again. My coming together with you like this and participating in a discussion about it, by reading texts like what we have by Fr. Giussani, or Fr. Julián Carrón, or whoever, (I have a lot of resources, perhaps too many), and in order to revive in me this recognition that this is true, that I really do think that we really are living in this culture of closed minds, and that this is very dangerous, how that came to be, these are interesting subjects that one could look at—how we came to live in such a culture and how can one get out of it, what allowed us to see these things, to see it this way, while other people don't, or might see it the opposite way, as an "open" culture—all of these are interesting subjects, and I find myself constantly going back to these sources that awaken me to this situation. "Awakening" is a good term. Suddenly things are there that were not there before because I didn't find them interesting.

Now, this problem, the problem of identifying the culture in which we live, has become relevant within the culture itself. That has been my own experience now, in the past year, year and a half, and that is the following, let me explain this: There is a great concern, there are many people concerned, that our present situation is dangerous, very dangerous for the survival of our humanity, and there is a need to establish a kind of global ethics that everybody in the world can adhere to, that will protect us from the great dangers of mistakes in areas such as biotechnology or the treatment of life issues, all the way to the climate—all of those subjects that are so debated today. The question is, can a point be found, a space created, of global agreement, so that at the very least measures can be taken that will guide us through these activities in a way that will minimize the possible disasters that are the results of experiments or of policies in these areas? And many people are interested in this, and among them, Joseph Ratzinger, who now has become Pope.

About a month before he became Pope, he had a public encounter with this philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, the father, if you wish, of contemporary European secularism who had in fact developed an entire philosophy; he called it The Theory of Communicative Action, as to how the secular state, without appealing to anything transcendent can indeed be able to create a sense of moral obligation that is needed in order for a society to survive, not to mention the world now. There is also the project associated with Hans Küng. I don't know what his canonical status is these days, but he was a Catholic priest, I guess he is a Catholic priest, but he has made it his life project now, the development of this

global ethics, if you wish, to find a basis for it. Our own president is constantly talking about the need to find a kind of a common ground or a point. And many people see this in economics, in science, in everything, even the crisis recently with the situation in Greece and the effects around the world. All of that is related. Can one find in this global age a common space that people can adhere to?

In this discussion, Ratzinger presented the problem, and at the end, frankly, came to the conclusion that at the present time it seemed impossible to do this, and that what should be done is to create opportunities for dialogue and conversations among, say, people of good will, people aware of the problem (let's put it this way), people who share this concern, and see what happens. And he even suggests how such a dialogue might be structured to create spaces where people can come together for this. It's a fascinating essay and you can find it; it's published in the book called *The Dialectics of Secularism* by Ignatius Press, of course. And there you see Habermas's proposal and Ratzinger's statement.

Since then, there has been a follow-up in which Ratzinger has not been able to participate because he's busy with other things. And now part two of the book is available, too. Here it is. It's called *An Awareness of What Is Missing* by, of course, Jürgen Habermas, et.al. Who are the *et. al.*? Members of the faculty at a university in Munich, mostly Jesuits, engaged in this discussion with Habermas as he moves forward, becomes more explicit and even more concerned about the role of religion, which he thinks secularism, by ignoring, has effectively led to this possible disaster, that it is necessary to find a secularist view of the role of religion that is not negative as it is generally in secularist ideology—something to be overcome. Habermas now holds it cannot be overcome, and in fact, it is not an obstacle, but a plus in what has to be done today in the search for this common humanity-type basis.

Now the reason I mention all of this again is because I want to underline that we in our own way, independent of these... When I read these things—this book, and the first one, and so forth, I feel great because I think, well, that corresponds to what we've been learning ourselves among ourselves based on the proposal, the method that we have learned from Fr. Giussani, who advises that if we follow this method, indeed what it will do is it will open us up more rather than closing us down. It will increase our field of interest, of vision and interest, and that other people will perceive that. They will perceive the difference between a gesture motivated by that that we might put forth, and one, say, devoted to a discussion of controversial issues just as we have all over the place. Again imagine that these people [observers of the meeting] are not here, I think that is an experience of the Advisory Board. Angelo just mentioned how surprised we are at the acceptance that has been given and the enthusiasm shown to our public gestures. That, for us anyway, is a confirmation at least of being on the right path in our own reflection on what has happened, let's put it that way.

Finally, another book that I want to recommend is by our friend John Waters, a completely insane man! On U-tube there is an interview with him. It's outrageous. John Waters has written a book called *Beyond Consolation*, and excerpts from his last chapter were in fact published in the latest issue of *Traces* in English. Of course he's written the book in English. And it is mostly in two parts: his own argument as to why the cultural situation today is one that diminishes our scope of human existence, and how it works. He goes into detail as to how this cultural poisoning, if you wish, (it's like a virus)

works, and how it works in all of us in such a way that you cannot step out of your house. You don't even want to step out of your house; it's in your house too, even in your most private world. It's something you breathe. How it works. And it's a fascinating proposal. Again I have areas of disagreement with him. You may find him too negative, or maybe too positive, or whatever, or, well, that may be so in Ireland, but not here, whatever. I'm not sure myself how much I agree with him in everything, but I certainly found it absolutely fascinating and again recommend it to you. His proposal is that the means through which this culture works its diminishment is the use of language, of words. That reminds me of the observation of Walker Percy, remember, in *The Thanatos Syndrome* about how words have lost their meaning, how they are re-defined, how the original experience that gave birth to a certain word, or that was described by means of that word, has been either lost or in fact replaced it by its very opposite. Again these are not crazy little people designing this out of malice. It is something that affects us all. We contribute to this. And so, as a writer, a journalist and a writer, too, John Waters is concerned about this question of the word, of course which leads him to depict a way out to the prologue of St. John's Gospel about the Word. "In the beginning was the Word..." And about the logos and all that kind of stuff that lands him right on the lap of the Pope who has been following the same path as it is underlined in the latest book of Habermas. So everything like that ends up coming together, and I think it's a wonderful moment of opportunity for us to go over that. The text that we have will guide us and assist us.

If this judgment of the contemporary culture is correct, if we can say "yes" to this proposal that we are in a cultural situation that somehow restricts where our humanity wants to expand to take us, be it through words or the control of what is interesting and what is not, all of that, if that is so, the question arises, How come we can see that? And second, can what allowed us to see it not help us get out of it, escape such an enslavement? Do you understand? And in vulgar terms, one would say, I would say, that you can almost see that if there's to be a solution to this, to this awakening, it has to be by means of a shock. In a sense we are shocked out of it by something that happens. In fact, what's fascinating about John Water's book is that an entire book was motivated by an interview of this Irish writer, feminist leader, secularist par excellence, poetess, Nuala O'Faolain. And she was discovered to have terminal cancer, and as the end approached she gave an interview on Irish TV, which was later published in all the newspapers, and in it is the most amazing thing. Clearly she has been shocked out of everything she held before. Out, for a moment, of the very culture that she created; she was one of the great promoters of this contemporary culture, and a fighter for it. So the death sentence and the knowledge that this was true, that she didn't have much time left, shocked her out of it. And when she was able to see the result of being shocked out of it, the first result is despair. And she expresses this despair in brutally honest and shocking words. It doesn't lead her to a solid conversion. Maybe suddenly all this talk of eternal life might be interesting after all. Not so. She never gets to that point. As far as we know, she died, and the last thing anybody ever saw was indeed this despair about her sudden coming nonexistence..., except for an interesting remark. I can't think of the exact words, but I can think of what it made me think of which is of course *West Side Story*. You see, my sources are a little bit more earthy than the great authors. I think of *The Golden Girls* and Betty White. We should have an encounter with her. Anyway, in *West Side Story*, there is a line which is indeed shocking after the murders have taken place and all that. One of the Jets finds another one crying and so forth, Baby John, and says to him, "I wish it was yesterday." And suddenly you realize that everything you have

seen, which is over half the show, has presumably taken place in the same day. It's not day after day that has passed. The day before, Maria and Tony had not met. Their meeting, all the way to the deaths that it eventually led to, all took place within the same day. And this kid experiences that and in a sense wants time to go back. "I wish it was yesterday." I wish I could have foreseen this yesterday. At least yesterday this did not happen. Well, Nuala O'Faolain says something like that in her interview. "I wish it was the past," or something like that, when it was possible to believe in an afterlife. At the present time she felt it would be dishonest to suddenly seek refuge in such a consolation. The title of John Water's book is *Beyond Consolation*.

So John and all of us who, in a sense, have for a moment at least broken through this cultural situation, and encounter not despair but something else suddenly like beauty, like interesting things, ask ourselves, what was the original shock? What changed, what happened in our lives that allowed this that was missing (at least as far as we know) in this lady's last moments. As far as I know, no one here has been told that they have five or six months left of life. That kind of thing tends to awaken you. But look at this...and for us I propose to you, this is what we learn, this is what I've been asked to judge, the proposal of Fr. Giussani in my life certainly is...meeting him, meeting the other people in the movement, but knowing very well that at the origin of all of this is Jesus Christ, an encounter with Christ, living Christ. An encounter with Christ is a shock, if I put it that way, that awakens us, and for the moment, at least for a moment, allows us to go beyond the limitations imposed by the dominant culture into the world of interest, of wonder, of fidelity, of certainty, even.

Now the problem is again (again I'm talking as if this culture were self-designed, as if there were evil people doing this—it's not so. It's all together.) The culture recognizes this danger and will therefore act in an intelligent way in trying to neutralize the encounter with Christ. The culture would be open to Christ-talk. No problem. In this way it hopes to distract you from the real shock. And again this is very well discussed in the *Traces* summary of the last chapter of his book, reducing Christ to the name we give to, now think whatever you want—something that inspires us, that offers us moral guidance, something that explains life to us...it is not an historical figure.

In an interview on television, John Waters said that the people who were reading it from the dominant culture had no problem until suddenly he mentioned that for 2,000 years an escape from this has been possible, an obvious reference to Christianity. At that moment, he said, he could see the mechanism alert itself and suddenly Christianity became a non-threat to the culture. It has been watered down. For example, people ask you, What does faith in Christ mean to you? And you tell them the story of how it guides your life and how in moments of despair, say in moments of death, illness or whatever, it consoles you, it has given you hope, especially hope is a big concern, and it has kept you going and so forth. You see these people on TV in disasters. "It was a miracle!" Their whole neighborhood has been devastated and their house is destroyed, they don't have anything, and suddenly, "It's a miracle." I'm sorry, but I'm too much of a skeptic. My question would be, well why didn't God just avoid the whole damn thing? Fine. You can only look at this with respect. I don't want to say anymore.

But that Christ that's being mentioned there, is it the son of Mary? Is it the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth? Or is it the name that can be given to a consoling memory or a consoling reality, inspiration,

such that other people who are not Christians would have other names for it. Christ is *your* name. I remember there was a meeting of university students a few years ago on one of those interminable vacations that we go to, there was this young Jewish woman who was completely happy and amazed at what she had experienced during that vacation together with our people, and she came to see me and said, “Well now what do I do? When I ask these people what I do, they mention Jesus, but I am a Jew. What is my Jesus?” Do you understand the question? What in my life can take the place of Jesus so that the Jesus that she saw the other people mentioning was a function of Jesus. Who is my Jesus? Moses? Abraham? The Torah? Who is the Jesus of the Moslem person that may have been impacted by being with us a week? Jesus becomes a name, an abstraction. And this the dominant culture has no problem with because he is not a menace. The menace is to insist that the Jesus you’re talking about is in fact the one who, as Fr. Giussani says, may be the center of history and the universe, but in reality he began as a blob in the womb of a fifteen-year-old Jewish girl. A presence within our world, within history, but of a reality that is of another world.

We will see in the text the reference to infinity, for example, how the culture sees infinity in a scientific way as an endless finity instead of something totally different. Infinity has never been finite. Our words are redefined like this. It’s how it happens.

At this point, I just want to barely touch on this. I found among the thousands of things that I have that make it difficult for me to get to and out of bed. Most of them are already in the bed, not to mention on the floor on the way out. This essay by Fr. Giussani, *On the Cultural Dignity of Christ’s Company* defines very well that point of departure, what this encounter with Christ is that allows you to break through the enslavement to the diminishing culture, again avoiding the manipulation of language. It tells the Gospel story of Jesus at that synagogue as he reads from the Prophet Isaiah and everybody sits down and he sits down to comment on it and says, “Today this has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All the promises that were made by the prophet are being fulfilled in my being here. Now we read something like that and it may be, at the very least, inspiring. But really not many of us, I don’t think anybody on the Board is Jewish, not many of us really care about the fulfillment of promises made to Abraham and to all these guys in the past. Who are these people anyway? Already scripture scholarship has fragmented all of that and you don’t really seem to have a cohesive unity even among Jewish people on these matters. You kind of pick your own rabbi and follow that. Christ making the claim today, “These prophecies are being fulfilled in my being here,” doesn’t shock us. So Fr. Giussani suggests that in order to recapture the shock that this implies, for example, suppose you over there or all of you here, I’m sitting here, I’m reading this text, and I were to tell you that I, in fact, am the reason that anything exists? I would tell you that. This is the meaning of life. This is the meaning of your life. That’s why you exist. That’s how you exist. This is where you’re meant to go. This is how you grow as a human person. This is it, and I tell you, but I’m not just telling you about it, I am it! The reason you exist, the reason the universe is there is me. Now you would have to come to the conclusion that I am completely insane, and how nice, and then cart me off some place where I can keep saying this, or how could anyone really say, “Yes, I agree. Maybe it’s true.”? How could you say, “Maybe it’s true.”? I propose to you that unless you are aware of that difficulty, we haven’t begun to take seriously the Christian proposal and therefore have no chance of breaking through the dominant culture’s restriction of our humanity or finding that which has Küng and Habermas and these people wanting to

find there's a global ethics.

Here in this text Giussani quotes St. Paul repeatedly making the same point: "I know nothing but Christ and Christ crucified. Everything else I've come to consider trash," and yet this is not a guy who tells you, "Close your mind to everything else." The opposite! "Sift through everything, test it, and keep what is good." Steal the material from whatever you find. If it corresponds to this original experience of yours so that you have been able to get struck, disturbed by Christ, keep it. The rest you can discard. It's already been ruined. Perhaps, Angelo, this is something that one could send to the Board members, the text of this on Christ and culture.

Now, our text. Three pages, extremely simple, it only makes the point I've made. Actually, I not only read it, but I went back, not trusting Angelo, and dug out the Italian version of it to see what he had decided to cut out. The best parts are out. In fact, the very beginning, there's something in the Italian text that's not at the very beginning of the English text. This is a question he asks: "Philosophically, that is from the point of view of reason [this is how he defines 'philosophically'] from the point of view of what is and seems and can be held to be reasonable, from that point of view, where is the position of the movement Communion and Liberation? In what way is it different from other groups, other coming-togethers within the Catholic world? What different point of view do we have about our eyes of reason about what we can observe? What is a defining attitude behind this charism?"

And then the answer given is what Angelo put here, the very first sentence: "The heart of the matter, for us, lies in the fact that *reality becomes evident in experience*." That is an answer to the question, What defines our approach? What makes Communion and Liberation distinctive? Not better or anything like that. We're just trying to understand ourselves. There are many paths. The Spirit blows where He wills, but for ourselves, because it makes sense, it is reasonable that if something has come to you in a particular way, you stay within there in order to continue being guided by it, to grow with it, to have this experience to say, meeting fruits of Fr. Giussani's charism, and then to suddenly say, "I got this out of it, that's fine, now let me try someplace else." It doesn't make any sense. It's not reasonable. Not because we're any better, but because if you have noticed something that has come to you through this, it makes sense to stay there and explore it further. That's the reasonable thing. But anyway, he seeks to answer that by saying, "What defines us, what we claim, is the fact that reality becomes evident in experience. What interests us is reality." Well here's the whole discourse I gave you on what is interesting. "If it is real, it is interesting. If it doesn't exist, it's not interesting." The amazing thing is that in my own experience, when Fr. Giussani says these little jewels, that are so incredible and astoundingly obvious that you (in my case I tend to use vulgarity, "Why didn't I say this before?"), I mean, what's the big deal? It's absolutely true! Something that is not interesting doesn't exist for me. Or something that doesn't exist cannot be that interesting because it doesn't exist! So the question is, I can detect what is real by seeing if it's interesting. If it interests me, if it has a suggestion of interest, I can say, well, maybe this is real. If it doesn't, if it's something that makes me say, "Who the hell cares," it doesn't change me in any way, it doesn't change my attitude to life, the way I see things, the way I stand before the world, the way I do things that matter to me, if it had no impact on that, then it's not interesting, and why waste my time? But if it is, then I can look and see what lies behind it. This entire paragraph is that way.



Experience. Now you can look for “experience” and “Fr. Giussani” and find on the Internet alone billions of stuff! We keep going back to experience. As someone said at a meeting I was at, “But we’ve already done that.” Don’t worry, they also refer that way to the resurrection of Christ. Come on, let’s do bottom line here! I mean we’re not philosophers at this point. I’m sixty-nine years old, forget it! What is this experience? And I find my *West Side Story* about experience. The experience that he’s talking about, when something is experienced, is something that I really care about, that is important to me, that moves me, I don’t think in a sentimental way. Actually, it may even be an unpleasant movement, but it moves me because I am aware of a need to account for this. There is something in me so that when this reality enters my radar scope, something in me is awakened by it, it recognizes that it has to look into this. Even if I don’t look into it, even if I keep postponing it again and again and again because I may be afraid of it or because it’s still not strong enough, I am aware that I am doing that. I am aware that I am postponing it, that I am failing, that I am maybe afraid of staying looking at it, but it’s there. If something doesn’t awaken this interest and move me to look at it, then it’s not an experience. It has to awaken me against all other possibilities. That is to say, it means that emotionally I may not find it a satisfying thing immediately. Something that satisfies me psychologically, or religiously, you better watch out, because I could be creating that myself. This reality that does this to me is interesting precisely because it is totally other than me. It’s something I would have never thought of. In my own case, I wonder, you know, I found, very depressing, a diary that I kept in the early 80s somewhere, and even yesterday I found the notes for the Meeting in Rimini in 2007. You know what? It was all there. Nothing has been said that’s new from there, and it wasn’t new because I had thought of it before I even met the movement. And I said, “Oh my God! What happened this year? At what point did it begin to happen that suddenly this thing began to matter, to be real, so that I can look at concrete things, so that I don’t look at a beautiful theological concept or a spiritual consolation, using *spiritual* that way, so that I look at a reality that has entered my field where my humanity is. This is again, as I say, for me it is easier to identify this when its effects are scary or negative, than when they are nice. Do you understand what I mean? In this particular case, in my own case, it has been that. About a year ago something occurred that is not over yet, but that really I realized that all my theology and all my everything was totally useless in dealing with this, and that something had entered that I cannot but have to say, forced to say by evidence that is beyond the possibilities of my creating it in my mind or anything else. I’ve been shocked out of this sleep.

Now the link between that and the person of Christ is discussed. The reality of awakening to something that has entered your range of experience is described by Giussani in the classic 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter of *The Religious Sense*. Here he refers to it, too, and I have that underlined. Notice that the text ends with those three questions that more or less very, very, very insufficiently but truly define the path that one must take in order to safeguard our awareness of this reality that has entered our life, and you can read them yourself. “What is reality made of?” If you look at these words even philosophically, technically, you’re lost. What is it made of? What is the stuff of reality? These words carry, bear, are valid because they are trying to capture an experience. You can take someone you love really passionately and you tend to say things like, “You are everything.” And you ask that person, “What is everything made of?” “Samantha.” That makes sense. In the world I’m talking about, that makes sense. I know that this is not made of Samantha. So the same here, when you say, what is reality made of, you don’t really want to give a chemical or whatever explanation. You want him saying it to you! When you encounter this,

what meaning does it have? How much is it important in your life? If it's all-important, then reality is made of it! That's what we have to keep asking ourselves, the first question.

The second question is based on the proposal that reality is made up of Christ. Once again, we're not crazy. The fact that it's made up of Christ, not only does it mean that everything is some kind of cloudish mush; on the contrary, things grow in their uniqueness and distinction to the degree that he is the stuff of which reality is made. It has to do with a Trinitarian love, and that is an amazing thing, a claim.

Third and finally though, well, that's all very nice, but where is Christ today? And here you have to watch out because you have to point out to me something really concrete if he has entered my experience. I have no experience of what lies beyond in eternity or anything like that. I experience things like this watch, this water, this coffee, etc... Is Christ one of those? If I can't encounter him, as I in a strange way encounter this bottle, nothing happens. Now that is the most difficult part to me of the proposal because I guess as an intellectual I tend to be satisfied with beautiful theology, but also with science, whatever it is. But the idea seems almost idolatry. This is not Christ! But in a sense... unless he is present to me in the same kind of concreteness that this is, then how can I say that I have experienced it? Where can we have that experience? Fr. Giussani's answer is the Church. In the life of the Church. I might say that he mentions Scripture, the sacraments, apostolic succession, the ongoing magisterium—all of these are concrete things. The man with my link to the apostles in this city has a face, a nose, and it is that man and not another one. The Scripture I read, the Old and New Testament, canonically recognized as such by the Church, the sacraments I receive. Baptism is not more powerful because I could be baptized by champagne; I have to use water. This concreteness is perhaps the most difficult part of the proposal to swallow, but if that is your initial reaction, stay with it because suddenly, in a real moment, you will swallow it, and it tastes magnificent, and you realize that that is what really corresponds to who you really are. That is what gives sense to your humanity. Christ is the unifying reality between all of these things, and somewhere in these endless books Cardinal Ratzinger or the Pope (I don't know which job he had at the time) said the biggest problem confronting the Church today is our inability to grasp the unifying reality within Scripture so that the Old Testament and for us what we call the New Testament, all of this, they come together, we don't fragment it. We grasp the unity behind it—the Word which is both a sense, a logos, reason, but also a personal address to us. How to capture that? That alone brings everything together.

“Our task,” says the Pope, “the most difficult one is to bring together the sacraments, apostolic succession...and the Scripture...The New Testament within itself, Old Testament together, all these things into one unifying reality.” And when that happens you will see what Fr. Giussani calls “correspondence with how we are made, our humanity.” As that is experienced it moves us. To live this in all the areas of life, and that begins to create the public gestures which we offer to people as a cultural fruit of this point of departure. Any other point of departure will be maybe initially impressive or satisfying, but in the end will change nothing. It doesn't have the strength to overcome the corroding influences of the dominant culture.