

# 4. More important than coherence is the relationship with a Presence

by Julián Carrón\*

As if he himself were struck by how new his thought was compared to the dominant opinion, almost perceiving our disorientation in front of his words, Giussani brings up the question that so troubles each of us. “But why is Simon’s *yes* to Jesus the birth of morality? Don’t the criteria of coherence and incoherence come first? Peter had done just about all the wrong he could do.” It is not a matter of painting reality differently. Yes, “Peter had done just about all the wrong he could do, yet he lived a supreme sympathy for Christ.” For us, these two things are almost incompatible; we cannot keep them together. Instead—what a freeing thing to hear this!— Peter discovered himself tending toward Christ. “He understood that everything in him tended to Christ, that everything was gathered in those eyes, in that face, in that heart. His past sins could not amount to an objection, nor even the incoherence he could imagine for the future. Christ was the source, the place of his hope. Had someone objected to what he had done or what he might have done, Christ remained, through the gloom of those objections, the source of light for his hope. And he esteemed Him above everything else, from the first moment in which he had felt himself stared at by His eyes, looked on by Him. This is why he loved Him.”<sup>1</sup> Just as happened with Mary Magdalene. Do you understand why she sought Him day and night? Not because it was her duty, but because she could not help but seek Him day and night.

“‘Yes, Lord, you know You are the object of my supreme sympathy, of my highest esteem.’ This is how morality is born [of the relationship with Christ]. The expression is very generic: ‘Yes, I love You.’ But it is as generic as it is generative of a new life to be lived.”<sup>2</sup> Have you ever needed to read these things to be able to look at yourselves? I confess, I do not think I have read anything more times than I have read these pages, in order to look at myself, to be able to embrace myself, to be able to look at myself the way He looks at me, to be able to discover that affective vibration that attracts everything. We will never be able to thank Fr. Giussani enough for enabling us to have this way of looking at ourselves, no matter what we have done, returning constantly to these pages to rediscover what enables us to look at ourselves in this way.

With unique solicitude for us, to avoid leaving anything out, to keep Peter’s *yes* from becoming a trap, a suffocating measure, Fr. Giussani asks the question that the moralism we »

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© 2016 Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione for the texts by J. Carrón “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have had pity on your nothingness”.

» have inside moves us to ask: “Is Peter’s *yes* automatically translated into coherence?” He answers, “Not in the least! I refuse to believe it! That *yes* exists and has an ultimate mysterious substance in its nexus with that Presence, with the attraction and the humanity of that Presence.”<sup>3</sup> That *yes* has such substance that it disconcerts those who demand an accounting from themselves or others. It has much more substance than any balance sheet.

And so? If the *yes* does not guarantee that we will not make mistakes, how should we stay in front of our all-too-predictable errors? In this regard, Fr. Giussani often quoted a passage from St. John’s first letter: “Everyone who has this hope based on Him makes himself pure, as He is pure.”<sup>4</sup> What does that mean? It means that “our hope is in Christ, in that Presence that, however distracted and forgetful we be, we can no longer (not completely anyway) remove from the earth of our heart because of the tradition through which He has reached us.” Christ is a presence that we can no longer uproot from our soil, from the soil of our heart. “It is in Him that I hope, before counting my errors and my virtues. Numbers have nothing to do with this. In the relationship with Him, numbers don’t count, the weight that is measured or measurable is irrelevant, and all the evil I can possibly do in the future has no relevance either. It cannot usurp the first place that this *yes* of Simon, repeated by me, has before the eyes of Christ. So a kind of flood comes from the depths of our heart, like a breath that rises from the breast and pervades the whole person, making it act, making it want to act more justly. The flower of the desire for justice, for true, genuine love, the desire to be capable of acting gratuitously, springs up from the depths of the heart. Just as our every move starts off not from an analysis of what the eyes see, but from an embrace of what the heart is waiting for, in the same way perfection is not the keeping of rules, but adhesion to a Presence.”<sup>5</sup>

Forgiveness certainly does not prompt the desire to err again. Only those who have never been forgiven can think this way. “Since I’ve been forgiven, I’ll do it again.” You might do it, but you do not truly desire to do so. Rather, you discover you desire to act in a more just way. “Only the man who lives this hope in Christ lives the whole of his life in asceticism, in striving for good. And even when he is clearly contradictory, he desires the good. This always conquers, in the sense that it is the last word on himself, on his day, on what he does, on what he has done, on what he will do in the future. The man who lives this hope in Christ keeps on living in asceticism. Morality is a continual striving towards ‘perfection’ that is born of an event that is a *sign* of a relationship with the divine, with the Mystery.”<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, Christian morality cannot in any way constitute an endorsement of our mistakes. But neither does it mean suffocating under the number of our errors, as Fr. Giussani says. “In the relationship with Him, numbers don’t count.” They are irrelevant. Christian morality is a striving that is born of wonder at Christ’s love.

<sup>1</sup> Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2010, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Notes from a meeting of the Diaconia of CL in Spain with Fr. Giussani, Milan, May 15, 1995, conserved in the General Secretariat of CL, Milan.

<sup>4</sup> *1 Jn* 3:3.

<sup>5</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.