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Reality, Reason, Freedom: At the Root of the Religious Quest

A discussion on Msgr. Luigi Giussani's *The Religious Sense*

With **Fr. Julián CARRON**, President of the Fraternity of Communion Liberation, **Seán Cardinal O'MALLEY, OFM Cap.**, Archbishop of Boston, and **Dr. Michael WALDSTEIN**, Professor of Theology, Ave Maria University

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Waldstein: Welcome to all of you for this key event of New York Encounter presenting the book of Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*. In our culture I think this is an extraordinarily important event. Our culture, some of you know, goes back to the Puritan beginnings in New England. One of the key figures in Puritanism was Francis Bacon who in some way is the inventor of the scientific revolution together with Descartes. Bacon's project was a very simple one. He proposed a new science of nature that would serve the interests of our power over nature, nature seen as raw material that we can use to better human life. It is interesting that Pope Benedict in *Spes Salvi* gives a deep analysis of how Bacon stands at the origin of the modern project. Ever since then, our culture here in the United States, and it has spread all over the world, has been a culture of doing and production, a culture of use which leads to a limitation of reason to the makeable and doable, and so mathematical mechanics became the great master science.

It's important that against this reduction of reason we reaffirm the full depth and breadth of reason. Pope Benedict did that in his Regensburg lecture. So Giussani's *Religious Sense* is a sustained effort in that direction and has therefore a singular cultural importance.

We'll begin with some music. Father Giussani said, "A people sings," and beauty played a great role in his life. We'll have Valentina Oriani-Patrick, accompanied by Jonathan Fields, sing "There Were You," a song from *The Fantasticks*.

[SONG]

My own name is Michael Waldstein. I'm from Austria. I met Cardinal O'Malley for the first time in Ave Maria a few months ago when he was there for a visit and was very impressed with his sermon and also the way he related to all of us.

His Eminence Seán Cardinal Patrick O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap., was born June 29, 1944 in Lakewood, Ohio, and was raised in Western Pennsylvania, where he entered a Franciscan seminary. At 21, he was professed into the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin and at 26 he was ordained a Catholic priest. After earning a master's degree in religious education and a Ph.D. in Spanish and Portuguese literature from the Catholic University of America, he taught at Catholic University and founded Centro Católico Hispano (Hispanic Catholic Center) in Washington, D.C., an organization which provided educational, medical and legal help to immigrants.

Since his ordination to the episcopacy on August 2, 1984, he has served as the Bishop of the dioceses of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands; Fall River, Massachusetts; and Palm Beach, Florida. Pope John Paul II appointed him Archbishop of Boston in July 2003. Pope Benedict XVI named him a Cardinal in 2006.

A cordial welcome to you, Cardinal O'Malley.

O'Malley: Thank you very much, Professor Waldstein. Good afternoon everyone. It's a great joy to be here today. I have great affection for Communion and Liberation, and we are blessed in Boston not only to have the Patriots as our team, but we have many enthusiastic members of CL as well as the Priestly Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo, and *Memores Domini*, so we indeed are very blessed. And I'm very honored to be invited here today to share in this panel about Fr. Giussani's book, *The Religious Sense*. Luckily we have Professor Waldstein and Fr. Carrón here to correct any mistakes that I'll make. That's why they put me on first.

Fr. Lorenzo Albacete told me that I should try and give some personal witness in light of Fr. Giussani's writings and spirituality and relate them to the present needs of the Church. It's always helpful when someone tells me what I have to talk about. I always find that to be the most difficult part of the task. I often share with people that when I was giving my first sermon, I was so nervous. I was a prison chaplain and I didn't know what I was going to talk about and I'd never given a sermon before. I took the book out, *How to Write a Sermon*. It said, "Speak into the horizons of your congregation." And I had this inspiration; I decided I'd talk about great escapes in the Bible. So I talked about Daniel in the lion's den, the three lads in the fiery furnace, St. Paul escaping over the walls in the basket at Damascus, Peter and James... I must say I had their rapt attention. The bad news came that night when six prisoners escaped and I thought my first sermon was going to be my last.

Fr. Giussani decided that he wanted to work with young people and speak into their horizons. He began as a seminary professor, but when he realized that the Church's message was not penetrating the young people, he decided that he wanted to be a teacher of the young. He said,

From my very first day as a teacher, I've always offered these words of warning to my class.

"I'm not here so that you can make my ideas your own. I'm here to teach you a true method that you can use to judge the things I will tell you. And what I have to tell you is the result of a long experience, of a past that is 2,000 years old." From the beginning, our educational efforts have always stood by this method, clearly pointing out that it was intended to show how faith can be relevant to life's needs.

These words expressed Fr. Giussani's original attitude towards the students right from the first hour of school, that of complete trust. One day he said that he had staked everything on the other's pure freedom. This trust is based on his acknowledgment of his students' critical capacity; that is, his acknowledgement of that resource with which nature endows a person enabling the person to become aware of reality to the point of knowing its meaning. Therefore, the religious sense is born with the personal experience of faith that Fr. Giussani had. Not a way to approach everybody, but from within the faith. Without a deep, lively and vibrant religious sense, Christ would not be the answer to the heart of man at the same time without faith. Without Christ, it's difficult to maintain this fervent religious sense.

What is the religious sense? Fr. Giussani defines in Chapter 5 that it is the very nature of being human, "the heart of human beings that expresses itself with questions such as: What is the ultimate meaning of existence? Why is their pain, death, and why in the end is life worth living? Or from another point of view, what does

reality consist of? And what's it made of?" Fr. Giussani concludes in Chapter 5 by saying, "Only the hypothesis of God, only the affirmation of the mystery as a reality existing beyond our capacity to fathom entirely, only this hypothesis corresponds to the human being's original structure." Fr. Giussani is telling us that Christ goes to the heart of the deepest desires of our human heart.

I often share the story of my own vocation that I trace to an episode in my childhood. My older brother was going on a retreat at the Capuchin seminary. I was too young to make the retreat, and my dad took me along for the ride. When we arrived, we met an old German friar in a tattered habit who was working in the fields. We stopped and talked to him for a long time. On the way home, my dad said, "That friar is the happiest man in the world." I instinctively knew that what my father said was true. The friar didn't have a beautiful wife, nice clothes, or a big car, but he was filled with peace and goodness, and I thought to myself, I'd like to be happy like that friar. Years later I joined the community there, and that same friar, Fr. Bede, became my confessor.

We need someone that's a father to us, someone that will educate us like my dad pointing out the friar and interpreting his life for me. Fr. Giussani and his education made him a father for so many in the Church. We need people like him to be able to understand ourselves. To live life for what our heart promises becomes a constant adventure.

I feel so privileged that I was allowed to live among the poor at the Centro Católico in Washington. There was seldom heat or hot water, the cockroaches were the size of rats, and the rats were the size of cats. There were always gun fights in the building where we lived, so one day I gathered all the tenants in the lobby for a disarmament summons. I put a table in the center of the room and asked everyone to hand their guns over. One old grandmother wearing a little bonnet opened her purse and produced a huge pistol. She waved it under my nose and said, "You're a priest; no one's going to do anything to you, but me, I'm keeping my gun!" Needless to say, I didn't collect any guns that day.

What I live, I live more intensely for Christ. The religious sense intensifies everything that we do by His love. In Chapter 10, Fr. Giussani describes how the ultimate questions arise. "The way of the religious sense," he says, "What is the formula for the journey to the ultimate meaning of reality? Living the real."

For me, working with the poor with my brother Capuchins was a joy. I used to think I was the happiest man in the world, and then one day God said, "Look at Fr. Seán. He's too happy. Let's make him a bishop." When they told me I was made a bishop I said, "I should have studied much harder in the seminary." I have been a friar for 45 years and I should be much holier after so many years of religious life, but I'm still a construction site.

Fr. Giussani, in the same chapter, says that we realize that we do not make ourselves. I don't hold myself in being. I understand myself as "I" and then come to know that I am distinct from other things. It is from this that the idea of life as gift originates. Furthermore, this attraction becomes known to me as beauty, as having some sort of harmony and order that is favorable to me.

When Fr. Giussani died in 2005, then-Cardinal Ratzinger delivered the funeral homily. Pope Benedict's admiration and affection for Don Giussani is always evident. In 2007, the Holy Father addressed members of CL on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of Communion and Liberation. The Pope says, To Don Giussani, the Holy Spirit aroused in the Church a movement that would witness the beauty of being Christian in an epoch in which the opinion was spreading that Christianity was something tiresome and oppressive to live. Fr. Giussani then set out to reawaken in youth the love for Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life," repeating that

only Christ is the road toward the realization of the deepest desires of man's heart, and that Christ saves us, not despite our humanity, but through it.

As the Holy Father had mentioned in the funeral homily, "Don Giussani grew up in a home poor in bread but rich in music." As he used to say right from the start, he was touched, or rather wounded, by the desire for beauty. Not any kind of beauty. He was searching for Beauty itself, and the infinite beauty that he found in Christ. Kierkegaard identifies the first stages of the spiritual journey as that of the aesthetical man being attracted or seduced by beauty. Von Balthasar has written so much about the transcendental beauty. It's a gift of the Spirit that allows us to see beyond appearances and glimpse real Beauty. As Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin says in *The Idiot*, "Beauty will save the world." In Pope Benedict's wonderful homily when he was here at St. Patrick's, he talked about the stained glass windows. He said, "When you look at them from the outside, they're dark and dreary, but when you see them from inside the Church, then you see the light, the color, the splendor and the beauty." It is in the Church that we discover that great beauty, the beauty that finds its source in God who is Beauty itself.

The religious sense for Giussani is a product of the spiritual aspect of humanity and lies within it at the level of the utmost questions. All of the Gospels recount for us the story of the rich young man, a man who was asking the right questions. He wanted to know the meaning of life, salvation. He was asking the right person. He asked the Lord. And when the Lord told him that he should live the commandments and sell his goods and give them to the poor, we are told that "he went away sad." One of the Gospels recounts how Jesus was looking at him with love. I can almost imagine that man averting his gaze because if he had realized how much the Lord loved him, he would gladly have made whatever sacrifice to follow Him. I'm sure that Fr. Giussani would have chased that man down the street to tell him to come back.

Giussani's last chapter raises the hypothesis of revelation and the conditions for its acceptability. Our God has accommodated Himself to us, to our human need, for the religious sense allows us to replace the word "mystery" with the word "Father." Fr. Giussani shows us that our hope is not based on cultural proposals, but on the event of Christ, on something that has already happened. Evangelization is to give witness to the verifiable fact that this event can and still does happen today because it has happened to us. It's something unforeseen, something amazing, something that surprises us, something that is not the result of our efforts or our particular ethical or spiritual dispositions. It is this that gives rise to concern because an event has touched our human heart and changed us and given us a new vision of life that we must share with others.

Fr. Giussani's insights continue to inspire young people to embrace a life of discipleship and find in the religious sense a path that leads to the mystery of God's transforming love. We are not orphans. We have a loving Father who has sent us Christ to teach us how to love and Fr. Giussani to teach us about Christ.

God bless you.

Waldstein: Thank you very much, Cardinal O'Malley, for a profound reflection. When the Cardinal says you are there to correct him, you have to obey him. So the seven mistakes that you made...

O'Malley: Only seven?

Waldstein: Let me just underline a point the Cardinal made, namely, in this situation in the culture where we've found ourselves, with a reduced reason, a reason that doesn't expect anything new except progress produced by

us, in that situation the decisive thing is an instrument God gave us, namely the heart, the heart understood not just as emotion, but the heart understood as love, as intelligence, as recognition of beauty, as a great openness. That's a key concept. To take our own heart really seriously as an instrument for discovering reality is a fundamental point of departure.

Introducing Fr. Carrón to you will be carrying owls to Athens. Fr. Julián Carrón who is the President of Communion and Liberation, successor of Don Giussani, was born in 1950 in Navaconcejo (Cáceres, Spain). While still very young he joined the Conciliar Seminary in Madrid, where he completed high school and theological studies. He was ordained a priest in 1975 and the following year graduated in Theology from the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid, specializing in Holy Scripture.

In 1984, he obtained his doctorate in Theology from the Faculty of Theology of Northern Spain, in Burgos. He was lecturer at the San Dámaso Institute of Theology, Religious and Catechetical Sciences, in Madrid, and Professor of New Testament at the San Dámaso Faculty of Theology in Madrid, where he taught "Introduction to Sacred Scripture," "The Pauline Corpus and Acts of Apostles," and "The Origins of Christianity."

In September 2004, he moved to Milan, called by Fr. Luigi Giussani, founder of the ecclesial Movement Communion and Liberation, to share the responsibility of leading the entire movement. On March 19, 2005 the Central Diaconia of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation appointed him President of the Fraternity, as successor of Fr. Giussani who had died on February 22, 2005.

Since the 2004-2005 academic year, he has taught Introduction to Theology at the Catholic University "Sacro Cuore" in Milan. In 2005, he participated, as a member appointed by the Holy Father, to the Synod of Bishops on the Holy Eucharist. On June 3, 2006, he spoke in St. Peter's Square during Pope Benedict XVI's meeting with the ecclesial movements.

If I can add a brief personal testimony, the years that Fr. Carrón has been responsible for the movement have been years of special growth for me because of a deep continuity with Fr. Giussani and at the same time a great clarity and intensity of thought. The path, the steps to be taken have been extremely helpful. So it is with joy that I welcome you, Fr. Carrón.

[link to Fr. Carrón's intervention: http://www.clonline.org/articoli/eng/traces_PagOne0211.pdf]

Waldstein: Thank you for this deeply stirring talk. One of the most characteristic theses of our culture is the distinction between facts and values. Hume, following Bacon and then Kant cemented that into our culture. The idea being that what you know seriously are the facts through science and science is value-free. Values are something we bring to the facts that are in themselves neutral. You see what a profoundly different vision *The Religious Sense* offers to that, a way into the inner beauty and goodness of our life itself. Listening to the two talks it seems to me the Christmas preface of the Roman liturgy which played such a key role in the first volume of Balthazar's book on glory is a perfect expression of what both of you have been saying. The preface says, "By the Mysterium, the Sacrament, the mystery of the Incarnate Word, a new light of Your glory has shone into the eyes of our mind so that while we visibly see God present in experience through the sacramental sign, we are drawn by Him to a love of invisible things."

Thank you very much for a profound talk.