



REASONS FOR HOPE

A discussion on hope and its rational foundations in light of the second volume of Msgr. Luigi Giussani's new book *Is it Possible to Live This Way?*

Speakers: **Msgr. Lorenzo ALBACETE**—Theologian, Author, Columnist
Mr. John ALLEN—Senior Vatican Analyst for CNN
and *National Catholic Reporter*
Fr. Julián CARRÓN—President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation
Prof. Edward NELSON—Professor of Mathematics, Princeton University

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Jack H. Skirball Center for the Performing Arts at New York University
566 LaGuardia Place at Washington Square South, New York

Crossroads: Good afternoon, and welcome to you all on behalf of Crossroads Cultural Center and Communion and Liberation. I would like to begin by thanking our distinguished guests for being with us tonight and I would like to thank the Catholic Graduate and Law Student Association of New York University for their support.

Today's discussion is the opening event of the first annual New York Encounter, a two-day cultural festival organized by Communion and Liberation and Crossroads. Where did this initiative originate? The education to the Catholic faith taking place in Communion and Liberation gives rise to a passion for culture, inspiring the exciting idea of a "cultural festival." We perceive that there is a new vibe in the air, that in many people of all walks there is a sincere interest in cultural initiatives, focusing above all on topics that are widely discussed in the public arena. Take *hope*, for example. Hope has been a recurring theme in public life for the past year.

The reasonability of hope and the possibility of pursuing an ideal that is not utopian is the topic of this afternoon's discussion. And it is also the subject of the second volume of *Is It Possible to Live This Way*, the latest book by Monsignor Luigi Giussani published in English. Thus, there could not be a better opening for NY Encounter than presenting this work.

Those who knew Father Giussani are aware of his love for music, and of the role that beauty played in his life. Hence, we thought that listening to a couple of songs would be a good way to open this afternoon's reflections. Valentina Oriani-Patrick, accompanied by composer Jonathan Fields, will sing a spiritual, "There is a balm in Gilead" and, in honor of Father Carron, a song in Spanish "Lela." Jonathan Fields and Valentina Patrick...

(SONGS)

Thank you very much! I now leave to Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, theologian, author, and columnist, who is also the Chairman of Crossroads' Advisory Board, the honor of introducing our guests and starting the discussion.

Albacete: Hi. This evening we present the book that is certainly not an abstract meditation on hope, but more of a testimony of how a certain hope emerges or is born in very concrete circumstances. It's part of our impact with reality in which absolutely nothing is excluded. That is why this presentation is preceded by two interventions dealing with how hope is being understood in our current cultural context. Hope is very much part of the current way of dealing with the challenges facing our country today. In fact, as we speak, the man who is about to become the next President of the United States is on his train on his way to Washington. He wrote a book, *The Audacity of Hope* and made hope one of the central themes of his campaign. We ask ourselves, upon what is this true audacity based? Is it reasonable? realistic?

On the other hand, providentially, the most recent encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, raised the banner of hope as the central point in the encounter between the Christian faith and today's world, placing the faith of

the Catholic Church right in the midst of the current cultural discussion. Our first speaker today will deal with that aspect of the issue. Our second speaker will speak about hope in the world of science and math, one of the leading sources of the current cultural situation, and then we will have the presentation of the book.

The first speaker, this is John Allen's biography. Well, let's see how much is true! John L., what is that "L"?

Allen: Lewis.

Albacete: Lewis. John L. Allen Jr. is a prize-winning Senior Correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter* and the Senior Vatican Analyst for *CNN*. Of course he is the only Vatican Analyst for *CNN*!

Allen: That was my opening line!

Albacete: I knew it. I love it! Well, we've done this gig before. I steal opening lines. He's the author of five best-selling books on the Vatican and Catholic affairs, and writes frequently on the Church for major national and international publications. This is, seriously speaking, absolutely true.

The London *Tablet* has called Allen "the most authoritative writer on Vatican affairs in the English language." His work is admired across ideological divides. Fr. Andrew Greeley calls his writing "indispensable," and the late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus called Allen's reporting "possibly the best source of information on the Vatican published in the United States." Of course, Fr. Neuhaus now has much more powerful sources of information. I'd like to take the occasion, a moment of tribute to Fr. Neuhaus. He was close to us and he helped us many times. He was willing to participate in whatever we asked. And so now, Fr. Neuhaus, go on; don't forget us.

Finally, John Allen's weekly internet column, "All Things Catholic," is widely read as a source of insight on the global Church. His current project is called *Mega-Trends in Catholicism: Ten Forces Turning the Catholic Church Upside Down*, a survey of the most important currents shaping the future of Catholicism. It should be fascinating. I don't know anybody who could do a better job.

John divides his time between Rome and his home in Denver, Colorado, and other places that he has not revealed.

And now in a serious vein, Professor Edward Nelson was born on May 4, 1932, in Decatur, Georgia. He is a professor in the Mathematics Department at Princeton University. He is known for his work on mathematical physics and mathematical logic. In mathematical logic, he is noted especially for his internal set theory. Nelson received his Ph.D. in 1955 from the University of Chicago, where he worked with Irving Segal. He was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study from 1956–1959. He has held a position at Princeton University from 1959 to the present, attaining the rank of professor there in 1964.

Prof. Nelson has made contributions to the theory of infinite dimensional group representations, the mathematical treatment of quantum field theory, (That is good stuff! That is good material! I'm going to put it in my own bio.) the use of stochastic processes in quantum mechanics, and the reformulation of probability theory in terms of non-standard analysis. For many years he worked on mathematical physics and probability theory, and still has a residual interest in these fields, particularly in possible extensions of stochastic mechanics to field theory. In recent years he has been working on mathematical logic and the foundations of mathematics.

And then, the man here, Julián Carrón was born in 1950 in Navaconcejo (Cáceres, Spain). While still very young he joined the Conciliar Seminary, Madrid, where he completed high school and theological studies. He was ordained priest in 1975 and the following year graduated in theology, specializing in Holy Scripture, at the Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Madrid.

He was lecturer at the Madrid Complutense University. He won a scholarship as *Élève Titulaire* at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem, where he worked under M. É. Boismard. He did a year's research at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. and was lecturer at the Theological School of the Conciliar Seminary, Madrid.

He headed the Minor Seminary, and was teacher of religion and in charge of pastoral care at *the Colegio Arzobispal de la Inmaculada y San Dámaso*, Madrid, of which he was director 1987-1994. He obtained his doctorate in theology at the Theological faculty of Northern Spain, at Burgos in 1984. He was director of the Spanish edition of the international review *Communio*, of the review *Estudios Bíblicos*, and Library of the San Dámaso Theological Faculty, Madrid, and of the San Dámaso Institute of Religious Sciences, linked to the Faculty.

In September 2004 he moved to Milan, called by Fr. Luigi Giussani, founder of the ecclesial Movement Communion and Liberation, to share his responsibility in leading the whole movement. On March 19, 2005 the Central Diaconia of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation named him President of the Fraternity, as successor of Fr. Giussani who had died on February 22nd. On May 13, 2005, Fr. Carrón recently participated in the Bishop Synod in Rome by special appointment of the Holy Father.

That's it. So John, start.

Allen: Hello there! You know, I found myself thinking as Msgr. was telling us Professor Nelson is an expert in stochastic processes that perhaps Msgr., on the strength of that introduction, could bill himself as an expert in sarcastic processes. He does really magnificent work!

On a more serious note, I'm here today to talk about hope, and I want to take advantage of the presence of Fr. Carrón to deliver a long overdue public note of thanks on my part for the great witness to hope that I think the Communion and Liberation movement represents. I got to know the movement in Rome when I lived there, and subsequently here in the States, and in both cases I have been tremendously impressed. You know, it's the nature of my work that I move in and out of a lot of different Catholic circles, so I get to see a lot of different groups kind of "doing their thing," and in my experience there are some groups in the Church that are very good at eliciting deep passion in people. There are others that are very good at inspiring great intelligence and creativity. There are others that are very good at inspiring a strong sense of community, a basic sense of enjoying one another's company, a pleasure and shared purpose. But there are very few that are capable of doing all of those things at once, and yet that is what I have watched CL accomplish time and again. Now I have to confess that after having said all that, I am one of those Catholics, and I swear to you that I have tried, but I am one of those Catholics that has never quite developed a taste for the writings of Fr. Giussani. I sometimes wonder if I lack the kind of required Mediterranean gene to sort of get into his mind, but in any event, I continue to read Fr. Giussani because I am convinced that it is his thought that was able to inspire such a remarkable *populo*, there's got to be something precious about it. So if you hear nothing else from me today, I did want you to hear this message from the bottom of my heart. It's a very simple, two-word message, and those two words are *coraggio* and *avanti*...

As the journalist on today's panel, I suppose it falls to me to try to connect our subject to current events, and as Msgr. has said, we gather at an especially fitting moment to do that because we are just three days away from the inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States. Now there is something magical about the time of transition in our national leadership that always seems to inspire a spirit of optimism among Americans. You probably know that old joke that getting married again after you've been divorced represents the triumph of hope over experience. I think there is something like that in our politics. No matter how disappointed we feel in previous presidencies, no matter how betrayed or let down we feel, somehow we always

manage to convince ourselves that it can be different this time around, and yet I think you would agree that even by those standards, that is, even by the standards of the normal honeymoon period that sets in, the Obama phenomenon is truly remarkable, and I think what makes it especially remarkable is this: I don't know that we have ever seen in our lifetime such a striking intersection of economic pessimism and political optimism as we are witnessing today. On one hand, it's no secret to any of us here, we are living through the deepest economic crisis to afflict our nation since the Great Depression. A recent survey found that 82% of Americans believe that we have not yet seen the worst of this crisis.

And of course the grim temper of the times is reflected in the kind of dark, gallows humor that is making the rounds, and you can always tell what's afoot in a culture by the jokes we tell. Have you heard the one about the young businessman who goes to the old veteran to ask advice? The young guy goes to the veteran and says, "Look, I'd like to run a small business. What do you think I should do?" And the veteran says to him, "Well, in this economy it's simple; just buy a big business and wait."

So economically we are convinced that our country is going to hell in a hand basket, and yet politically we are on the other end of the spectrum. The President-elect is currently closing in on an approval rating of an astonishing 90%. Of course, on Tuesday we expect the most mammoth outpouring of humanity ever to witness the swearing in of a public official.

But forget all that. Those are political yardsticks. I mean, in this culture, the true measure of somebody's appeal is the ability to make money off his or her image. And by that standard too, Obama is a raging success. You probably know that he recently popped up in *Marvel Comics* as a sidekick to Spider Man! But in my opinion, the real proof of the point is on TV for all to see. I'm talking about those infomercials peddling these absolutely tawdry dinner plates and commemorative medallions celebrating his inauguration. We sometimes talk about somebody's shock value. I think those products are proof positive of Obama's "schlock" value!

In other words, there is a striking juxtaposition between perceptions of grave economic decline, and great political possibility, between despair and hope. And obviously, these two things are related. The more dire we perceive our circumstances to be, the more desperately we crave something or someone to give us hope.

Now, of course, whether the hopes that I'm talking about will survive the first hundred days of his administration, or its first term, or its eventual place in history all remains to be seen. I didn't bring my crystal ball tonight. I'm not going to play the role of the oracle. Instead, I want to focus on the most important bit of Catholic subtext to this national mood which is the ambivalence that so many of us feel—our inability to share fully in the optimism surrounding the incoming administration because we fear that it does not represent a new hope for the already most vulnerable segment of our society, meaning, of course, the unborn, and embryonic human life.

The political reality that we face means that to the "yes, we can" of the Obama campaign, many Catholics, and to be sure many other people of conscience as well, with deep reluctance still feel compelled to answer, "No, we can't, at least not without serious reservations." And as a result we find ourselves on the outside looking in, so to speak, as America rings in the age of Obama. And what makes all of this especially wrenching is that seen through Catholic eyes there is so much to celebrate about the hope that currently runs through our political life. Obviously we understand the historical significance of the election of an African-American in a country that once enshrined racial slavery as part of its very constitutional order. As members of the global Church, we understand too what this resolve means across so much of the world, particularly the developing world. We cannot help but be impressed and edified with the idealism of so many young Americans who entered the political process for the first time, who embraced the Obama campaign as a rejection of cynicism in a kind of "me first" world. To the extent that our new President is able to lead us on a new path, one that embraces

compassion over confrontation, one that puts the option for the poor at the center of policy, that option which the Holy Father on his trip to Brazil reminded us is at the core of our Christological confession. To the extent that he's able to do all of that we long to rejoice and to offer our support.

And yet as Catholics we have also heard the clear message coming from our leadership. To date the only religious body in America which has flung down a gauntlet before the new administration has been the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. During a their fall meeting in Baltimore just a few days after the election, the bishops declared that should the administration move forward with an aggressive policy on abortion, and in particular should it move forward with the Freedom of Choice Act, which would reverse all existing federal and state restrictions on abortion, something the candidate Obama promised to do on the campaign trail, should that happen, the bishops warned, the result would in effect be cultural war. Now that shot across the bow won the bishops an image in some quarters as the political equivalent to the Grinch who stole Christmas, but it is difficult to argue that their concern is somehow misplaced.

And thus we face a great paradox. As Catholics, as Christians, we are called to be a people of hope. That, after all, was the motto of the Holy Father's visit to the United States—"Christ Our Hope." We sense that there is a great deal good and noble in the hope surrounding President-elect Barack Obama. And both our faith and our concern for the common good creates a hunger to share that hope. Yet that same faith and that same concern for the common good also seems to be impelling us to mount the barricades of political opposition. It is a painful situation and it is hardly surprising that Catholics are not of one mind about how to respond.

Now I am a journalist, neither a politician nor a pastor of souls, and therefore it would clearly be above my pay grade to try to offer a solution to all of this. However, I would like to offer three brief observations which may provide some resources for minds better than my own to ponder the challenges that we face.

First, there will be natural opportunities for Catholics to work with the Obama administration on many fronts. For example, Catholic leaders can and should play an important role in helping to insure that whatever economic recovery plan eventually takes shape works to the benefit of all and especially the poor. Immigration reform also seems destined to be among the early priorities in the new Congress and the new administration. Internationally few regions of the world have been marked for special attention by the Holy See in 2009, and both of them will be on the radar screen of the administration as well. I'm talking about Africa and the Middle East. On the Catholic side of the ledger, three events are going to make 2009 something of a year of Africa for the Catholic Church. The Holy Father will be going to Cameroon and Angola in March, the African Bishops will be holding their plenary assembly in Rome in September, and they will have a Synod of Bishops for Africa in October. Meanwhile Obama is at a unique historical position to exercise leadership in terms of moving both the international community and moving things on the African continent, particularly. His mammoth popularity across Africa—believe me, every opinion poll tells us that he is more popular in Africa than any elected African leader. He is, in effect, the uncrowned king of the continent. All of that creates an opportunity for Church and State to work together. The Holy Father is also scheduled to visit the Holy Land in May. Obviously the current conflict between Israel and Hamas and the Gaza Strip has offered us a fresh reminder of the urgency of promoting a comprehensive peace.

Without in any way compromising or muting the Church's witness in defense of unborn life, all of these areas represent potential zones of common ground between the Church and the Obama White House, areas in which we can indeed affirm the hopes generated by the new administration in full confidence that we are doing so in coherence with the teachings of the Church. And it is worth noting, I think, that this clearly seems to be the tone that the Vatican itself is trying to strike. As you know, the Holy Father and the President-elect had a conversation shortly after his election. Vatican officials have repeatedly signaled their willingness to work with the Obama administration on issues such as poverty relief and conflict resolution. Alright, that's the first point.

Second, there is a political law of life about all incoming administration which is that in 12:01 p.m. on Tuesday forward, the central preoccupation of this first-term administration will be securing a second term. That's inevitably how it works. And one thing we learned about the Obama people during the 2008 election is that they are certainly not stupid, which means that they realize the historical forces which propelled their candidate to victory this time around. And I'm not talking about Obama-mania. I'm talking about three basic political realities: One, an incumbent president with the lowest approval ratings in the history of the republic, two, an economy in the toilet, and three, an unpopular foreign war. Those three things are not going to be of help four years from now, and this means inevitably the new president will be shopping for new friends. Therefore, it seems to me, the key political question for the Catholic Church becomes, how will we condition the Obama administration to think about us? Will it be the way that Republicans today think about labor unions? Or the Democrats think about gun owners? That is, a constituency so entrenched in the opposition that there's no real point in reaching out to them? Or will it be the way that both parties currently think about suburbanites?—that is, swing voters, so that there is a very strong political motive to sort of pitch woo in their direction.

Now different Catholics are obviously going to lean in different directions. But the question is, where will the center of gravity fall? And how that question is answered, I think, will have a great deal to do with our ability to influence the administration, including on the defense of human life. One could argue, in fact, that exploiting the areas of collaboration that I mentioned a moment ago would not be parallel to the Church's concern on abortion, certainly not in place of it, but instead, such collaboration could be instrumental to that concern because it would buy us political leverage to make the case for life. In other words, what I'm trying to suggest is that I don't think we have to feel compelled to choose between feeling hopeful about the new administration and feeling loyal to the unborn. In fact, building on the former may enhance our capacity to realize the latter.

Third and finally, I want to say a brief word about the state of the Catholic soul in America. It is no secret that the Church in America is frequently a house divided against itself. And once again during the 2008 elections these fault lines were all-too-obvious, between red state and blue state Catholics, between the hierarchy and the grassroots, even within the bishops' conference itself. The split in the Catholic vote in November I think amounts to a fairly accurate barometer of the deep clefts which run through our Church. If we want to be a people of hope, I would suggest, Catholics in this country arguably face challenges far more fundamental than how to react to the Obama administration, and that is how we react to one another. And if you permit me, I want to tell one brief story that I think will hammer this point home.

Some of you may know that I grew up in a rural western Kansas. Now I don't know if any of you have ever been to rural western Kansas, and to be honest, I can think of no earthly reason why you should have been. But if you ever have been to rural western Kansas, you will know that it is not exactly a thriving crossroads of the tourist industry. In fact, about the only time we get significant numbers of out-of-town visitors is during the fall because that is pheasant hunting season. And there's a certain kind of guy who finds the idea of putting on combat fatigues and blasting shotguns over the course of the weekend to be a real hoot. Now usually this is done while consuming copious amounts of beer, so to be honest they're generally a far greater threat to one another than they are to the pheasants. But nevertheless, they come. My 93-year-old grandmother, God bless her soul, lives in a small western Kansas hamlet called Hill City. It is my candidate for the least aptly named place in America because there is no hill, and there sure as hell is no city! We're talking about 400 people on a good day, huh? Now, folks, I have seen some pretty funky lodgings around the world, but the Western Hills Motel in Hill City, the only motel in town, eleven rooms, is the only place I have ever stayed in where there is a laminated sign in the bathroom that reads, "Please do not gut your birds in the sink." That's the cultural milieu we're talking about.

Now this anecdote is set on one weekend during pheasant hunting season. We've got an out-of-town guy, let's call him a lawyer from New York, who has come out to Grand County, Kansas to try and bag himself a bird. He's spent a long and frustrating weekend with no success. Finally it's Sunday afternoon and he's getting ready

to get into his rental car to drive the 400 miles back to Kansas City to fly back to La Guardia. He decides before he leaves that he's going to take one last shot. So he sees a pheasant moving across the skyline, he shoulders his weapon, he fires, and miracle of miracles, he brings down the bird. So flushed with pride he sets across the field to pick up his trophy, and just as he gets there he comes across this barbed wire fence that is clearly labeled, "Private Property. Keep Out." But he has invested far too much blood, toil and tears and sweat at this stage, so he starts climbing the fence to get the bird, and as he does so, this western Kansas farmer pulls up in his tractor, and he yells at him, "Hey buddy, what are you doing?"

And the lawyer says, "Well, that's my bird. I'm going to pick it up."

And the farmer says, "No you're not. That pheasant fell on my property; it belongs to me."

Now the lawyer of course is hot and tired and he's in a hurry, so he just erupts and he says, "Look, you don't understand. I'm a senior partner in a top ten law firm in New York, and if you don't let me have that bird, I'm going to sue you back to the Stone Age!" Not realizing, of course, that this is pretty much where the farmer already is!

So the farmer just looks at him and smiles and says, "Well that may be how you do things where you come from, but around here we have a little thing we call 'the three kick rule.'"

The lawyer says, "The three kick rule? What is that about?"

The farmer says, "It's very simple. I kick you three times. Then you kick me three times. We keep going. Whoever eventually gives up loses the bird."

The lawyer thinks, well, it's probably less expensive than a law suit, besides which this guy looks like he's 913 years old. I can probably take him. "Alright, let's do it."

So they line up against one another. The farmer looks at him and says, "Are you ready?"

The lawyer says, "Yes, I am."

Now the farmer, you have to understand is wearing these heavy mud-clog western Kansas work boots, okay? So he gives the lawyer one kick in the shins. The guy howls in agony. He gives him another shot in the solar plexus. This time his cries of pain can be heard to the Nebraska border. For those of you who don't know your middle American geography, that's a fair stretch away. He gives him one last shot under the chin, but this time the lawyer is seeing stars; he's barely conscious. But finally, with his last best ounce of effort he staggers to his feet, dusts himself off, puts this little grim determination on his face, stares the farmer dead in the eyes and says, "Alright you old coot, now it's my turn."

And the farmer looks at him and smiles and says, "Nah, it's alright. I give up. You can have the bird." That's how we roll out in western Kansas.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would submit to you, too often our current conversation on the Catholic Church in the United States resembles an ecclesiastical version of "the three kick rule." That is, too often we are not really interested in a patient search for understanding with Catholics who may think differently than we do, worship differently than we do, and yes, vote differently than we do. Too often what we are really looking to do is to score rhetorical cheap shots against people we perceive to be our ideological enemies. Now under any set of circumstances, that way of doing business would be difficult, problematic. But under the set of circumstances we face today, the complexity we Catholics face in terms of trying to think our way through, through the hope

and yet also the ambivalence and the pain we feel about the political direction of this country, that way of doing business is quite simply unsustainable. Now, in order to think our way out of this box, this kind of blind alley of ideological warfare and ecclesiastical tribalism, that is a work that is going to require energy and imagination and leadership for all of us. It is not in the first instance a task for our hierarchy or for a theological guild, or for any other specialist class. It is in the first instance a work for all of us, which means in the first place for all of us gathered in this room here today. And as the guy who gets paid to watch what you do and to write about it, that is, as your chronicler and your scribe, I look forward to watching you rise to this occasion which I have no doubt, none at all, that you will.

Thank you and God bless.

Albacete: Good stuff. Professor Nelson...

Nelson: [Follow link for Prof. Nelson's speech]

<http://crossroadsculturalcenter.squarespace.com/events/2009/1/17/new-york-encounter-reasons-for-hope.html>

Albacete: And now, Fr. Julian Carrón...

Carrón: Good afternoon everybody. I'd like to divide my contribution this evening into three parts: First I will address the question of expectation.

1) Expectation: The structure of man

“Has anyone ever promised us anything? Then why should we expect anything?” Fr. Giussani always cited this phrase of the Italian poet Cesare Pavese to point out to us the structure of man—expectation. Each one of us can recognize in their own experience the extent to which their life is full of expectation, whatever form that may take. We can say therefore that expectation is the very structure of our nature; it is the essence of our soul. In *The Religious Sense* Fr. Giussani explains this expectation - “It is not something calculated: it is given. For the promise is at the origin, from the very origin of our creation. He who has made man has also made him as “promise.” Structurally man waits; structurally he is a beggar: structurally life is promise.”

This expectation imposes itself on us in such a clear way that we think we know what we expect. Unfortunately on many occasions we have to recognize how true the phrase of the French writer, Francois Mauriac is, when he writes, “I have always deceived myself about the object of my desires. We do not know what we desire.” This observation is confirmed dramatically in the diary of Pavese. When he had obtained the most highly prized Italian literary award, the Premio Strega he commented: “You also have the gift of fertility. You are the master of yourself, of your fate. You are as famous as any man can be who does not seek to be so. Yet all that will come to an end. This profound joy of yours, this glow of super-abundance, is made of things you did not take into account. It was given to you. By whom? Whom should you thank? Whom will you curse when it all disappears?” On the day of the prize giving in Rome he wrote “In Rome, glory. And then what?”

How many times have we too, like Pavese, been equally surprised by the same thought, “And now what?” after obtaining, like him, what we sought. Why? Why, after getting what we dreamt about, do we find ourselves with this insidious question on our lips? It is precisely in the moment of disappointment, paradoxically, that we realize the very nature of the expectation which constitutes us and reveals to us the nature of our person. That “eternal mystery of our being” which the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi speaks of. What is it that we are waiting for and that nothing, not even the most clamorous success is able to substitute?

Once again it is the genius of Pavese, who was so faithful to his own experience as to be marvelled by it, which gives an answer to this question, “What a man seeks in his pleasures is infinite and no one would ever give up hope of attaining that infinity.” Nothing is capable of satisfying us, because what we seek in what we like, in

pleasures, is infinite. And it is this that allows us to understand our disappointment. In fact the very experience of disappointment reveals what our hearts are made for. If we did not have a limitless desire, we would not have the experience of disappointment.

If this is the human condition we must ask the question - does a reasonable foundation exist for expecting the fulfilment of our thirst for happiness? The present situation, in which it seems that everything is collapsing before our eyes, makes this question even more urgent. Is it possible to hope? This question introduces us to our second point

2) The Grace we need in order to have hope

“In order to hope, my child, you have to be very happy, you have to have received a great gift or grace,” says the French poet Charles Peguy. With this affirmation Peguy places himself poles apart from any presumptuous attitude, because he recognizes that the possibility of hope is founded not on anything we can construct but on grace, that is to say, on something which is given. It is a gift. It is this grace which makes hope reasonable.

Let me give you a simple example which allows us to understand the truth of what Peguy says. What is the experience of anyone who has received the grace to be brought up in a normal family situation? They have the experience of having reached an indestructible certainty that their mother loves them. This is not something we can take for granted; it is a real grace that our mother loves us like this. Now can whoever has had this type of experience ever imagine that there could be a moment in life when his or her mother may not love them. No! I cannot think, no matter what I might do that my mother will not love me; I would have to deny my own experience. On what am I basing this certainty for the future? On the certainty of my experience in the present.

With this experience before our eyes we can introduce in a simple way Fr. Giussani's approach to the question of hope which is the theme of the book *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Volume 2, Hope* which is being presented here this evening.

What is this great grace of which Peguy speaks? It is faith in Jesus Christ. The great grace is the certainty of faith. Faith, as Fr. Giussani explains, is the recognition of a presence, which allows man to experience such a unique correspondence to the expectations of the heart and of which the only possible origin can be divine. Andrei Tarkovsky, the famous Russian film-maker, made one of his characters in the movie *Andrei Rublev* say: “You know very well, you can't manage to do anything, you are tired, you are exhausted, and at a certain moment you meet among the people the gaze of somebody, somebody's gaze, and it is as if you approach the hidden divine, and everything becomes easier.” The experience of this presence, as in the case of the mother, is the foundation of hope.

Fr. Giussani explains, “Hope is none other than the expanding of the certainty of faith regarding the future.” (p.86) If faith is the recognition of a presence which corresponds to the expectations of the heart, then hope is to have certainty for the future, which is born of that presence. It is the extension into the future of the certainty of the present.

In the beginning of his encyclical *Spe Salvi* Pope Benedict the sixteenth speaks of “trustworthy hope.” He states, “Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey.” (*Spe Salvi* n.1)

For this reason hope is the most basic test to ascertain if our faith is an experience – an experience of certainty which is so real that we can base everything on it - , or if alternatively it is a mental category or discourse which

is not capable of offering a solid foundation. For this reason Fr. Giussani insists, “The great grace from which hope is born is the certainty of faith; the certainty of faith is the seed of the certainty of hope.” (p.12) So hope is based on a present, “but a present is truly the present insofar as you possess it; therefore hope is certainty in the future that is based on a possession already given,” (p.14) on a great grace, as we said earlier.

Therefore, the Christian experience can be considered anything but unreasonable. It is not a vague unsubstantiated hope, some sort of irrational optimism which goes against the factual evidence. On the contrary its reasonableness is based on a knowledge which is verified in experience. For this reason we can say it is based on something which has already been given.

Once again *Spe Salvi* points this out, “Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a “proof” of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a ‘not yet’. The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.” (n.7) And again,” The promise of Christ is not only a reality that we await, but a real presence.” (n.8)

It is with this presence in front of me that I can now look without fear at the scope of my expectation, of my most profound desires. It is in the company of this presence that I can dare to pose the real question. And this brings me to my final point this evening

3) The fulfilment of desire

“Will these desires ever be satisfied, yes or no? This is the question. These desires, made according to the needs of your heart, can be sure of being realized, only to the degree that one abandons oneself, trusts and abandons oneself to the Presence.” I have hope because I am certain of the power of the great Presence recognized in faith, knowing that the need for happiness, which constitutes me, will be fulfilled only by God.

This means that my desire is fulfilled only to the extent that I surrender to the Presence that faith has recognized. The demands of the heart attest that the object of the heart exists, it is there in the future, because man is destined to be happy, just, and true. But the certainty that this will happen cannot be sustained by our heart. The certainty that this will happen can derive only from the Presence that faith recognizes: it is not we but He; it is the outstanding Presence of Christ that faith recognizes.

The dynamic of hope is a desire that could not last in time, which would always be subject to bitter disappointment, if it were not sustained and supported by the certainty of the power of the great Presence. This is why the entreaty for this Presence arises from the awareness that it is not we who fulfil, but His presence. Our freedom expresses itself as an entreaty to this Presence that it may fulfil. St Bernard summarizes this in a beautiful formula, “Is not desire an invocation? Certainly it is, and a strong one too.” (p.32, Spirit.Ex.)

How does God answer this invocation?

The form of the answer to this invocation is not, as we often think, the creation of our imagination. On the contrary, “This form is none other than the great Presence Himself.” (p.23) We can understand this well in our experience: it is not the gift that the person gives me that constitutes the fullness of that need for happiness. What makes me happy is the person him or herself, not the presents they give me! “The contemplation of God’s gift is certainly a sweet comfort for us,” writes Guillaume de Saint Thierry, “but it does not satisfy us perfectly [even if we have everything] without His Presence”.

Hope, therefore, does not mean hoping for “something” from God, but hoping for God Himself. Because of the fact that our nature is desire for the infinite, only the Infinite God Himself can fulfill our desire. St. Augustine says it well: “May the Lord God be your hope; do not hope for something from the Lord your God, but may your Lord Himself be your hope. Many hope from God something outside of Him; but you search for your God Himself.... forgetting other things, remember Him; leaving everything behind, press forward towards Him.... He will be your love.”

The form of the answer to human desire is Christ Himself. Christ is the only hope for the fulfilment of our affection. He alone, He alone is capable of satisfying, of truly fulfilling affection. Anything else can't really satisfy us. This is why all men burn with desire; but how difficult it is to find one who says: “My soul thirsts for You, my God” (Psalm 63,2)!

Christ, the Presence recognized by the faith, is the only reasonable foundation for hope. Without Him, human life lacks of a base for sustaining life. But this is the way it is, because “man's life,” St Thomas Aquinas confirms, “consists in the affection that principally sustains it and in which he finds his greatest satisfaction.”

As an example of the kind of hope that blossoms from Christian faith, and that is capable of challenging even the worst human conditions, when everything around is collapsing, I invite you to watch this testimony of our friends in Uganda. We will watch some clips of a documentary called *Greater*, which won an award at this year's Cannes Festival. The committee was chaired by the American director Spike Lee

Thank you for your kind attention.

[follow link to see the documentary- <http://www.babelgum.com/html/clip.php?clipId=113782>]

Albacete: At this point I'm supposed to ask each one of our speakers a question. I don't know whether to do it or not. After this I think it would be ridiculous. Who can? So I can only say I hope this afternoon we've had a glimpse at least, if not a beautiful vision of the true audacity of hope.

Thank you very much.