

3. Not a precept, but a Presence to look at

by Julián Carrón*

“In fact,” Giussani continues, “no reproof came.” Jesus simply asked him again, “‘Simon, do you love Me?’ Not uncertain, but fearful and trembling, he replied again, ‘Yes, I love You.’ But the third time, the third time that Jesus threw the question at him, he had to ask confirmation from Jesus Himself: ‘Yes, Lord, You know I love You.’ All my human preference is for You, all the preference of my mind, all the preference of my heart; You are the extreme preference of life, the supreme excellence of things. I don’t know, I don’t know how, I don’t know how to say it and I don’t know how it can be but, in spite of all I have done, in spite of all I can still do [now, right now], I love You.”¹

As we see, there predominated in Simon this instinctive affection, this preference, and he himself was the first to be amazed by it. “I don’t know how.” He cannot explain how this is possible, but he cannot help but discover it within, as something more decisive than all the mistakes he had made.

Fr. Giussani’s genius is seen in the simplicity with which he lets himself be taught by the story, not reducing Peter’s yes to a sentimental feeling, an exciting moment, lyrical and moving, but grasping all its importance, as it generates and establishes a new thing in life. “This yes is the birth of morality, the first breath of morality in the dry desert of instinct and pure reaction. Morality sinks its roots into this Simon’s yes, and this yes can take root in man’s soil only thanks to a dominant Presence, understood, accepted, embraced, served with all the energy of your heart; only in this way can man become a child again. Without a Presence, there is no moral act, there is no morality.”²

Just one line like this would suffice to demolish entire books on morality and many of the strategies that seem so intelligent to us. What can sink its roots into us, what can take root in our innermost depths, is not a law or a precept, a discourse or a lesson, but, as Fr. Giussani says, only a Presence, “a dominant Presence, understood, accepted, embraced.”³ This is liberating. Without this Presence, the *yes*—therefore morality—cannot take root in the soil of our hearts. It would be useless to complain. It is not possible, no matter how hard we try—the *yes* cannot take root without that dominant Presence. “Without a Presence, there is no moral act, there is no morality.” Christ Himself said so. “Without Me you can do nothing.”⁴ The mercy of God had to become flesh, presence, carnal presence, historical »

* From the booklet of the Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation 2016.

© 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”.

» presence, to succeed in drawing all of the human person, to enable the yes to take root in the heart of the human person.

What is so particular in this Presence, that it evokes the yes and thus the new morality?

Fr. Giussani has written: “This man, Jesus, has a very simple human characteristic: He is a man from whom emanates a human *vibration of affection*” that can never issue from a law, a lesson, a list of things to do. It is a human attraction provoked by that flesh. And “morality, that is, the victory over nihilism,” over dissolution, over ending up like a floating mine, “does not mean never making mistakes, never erring, but, even when you make mistakes, even when you err, in the end you hear, ‘Simon, do you love Me?’ and you answer, ‘Yes, Lord, I love You.’” I can err a thousand times but still say “Count me in. I want to be with You and the human affection that emanates from You, Jesus of Nazareth. Count me in. And within this affection that emanates from You I learn, I learn to live, I learn to be a human being. Morality is very simple: it means choosing to go with an affection, a human affection, human, like the affective vibration a mother feels for her child and the child feels for her.” The issue is not that the child never messes things up—this would be impossible—but that she learns to live. All that is needed is for her mother’s instinctive affection to attract her and draw forth all her own affection. A mother’s affection is gut-felt; it comes from her inner depths, like the affection of that Man for Peter. “Jesus has this human affection for you, for me and, notwithstanding my mistakes, I say, ‘Yes Lord, I choose You, this affection.’ This affirmation is the ultimate possibility for overcoming the nihilism that we ‘catch’ through contagion from the society in which we live.” Fr. Giussani continues, “It is very important to me that you reflect on what I just said at the end, that morality—responding yes to Christ who asks us, ‘Do you love Me?’—has a very simple beginning, which is the simplicity of opting for staying with this affection. Being there with this affection has a very simple beginning, which is *looking*; a gaze upon Christ.”⁵

¹ Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2010, pp. 60-61.

² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Jn* 15:5.

⁵ Luigi Giussani, “La virtù dell’amicizia o: dell’amicizia di Cristo” [The Virtue of Friendship, or Of the Friendship of Christ], *Tracce-Litterae communionis*, n. 4, April 1996, pp. IV-V.