



Cultural Center

CAN FAITH BROADEN REASON?

A Discussion on Faith, Knowledge, and Experience in Light of Msgr. Luigi Giussani's Forthcoming Book

with speakers

Msgr. Lorenzo ALBACETE—Theologian, Author, Columnist

Fr. Julián CARRÓN—President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation

Dr. Robert POLLACK—Professor of Biological Sciences, Columbia University

Dr. Joseph WEILER—Joseph Strauss Professor of Law, New York University

Sunday, January 20, 2008, 4:00 PM

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

Simmonds: Good afternoon, and welcome to all of you 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'd also like to thank the Catholic Graduate and Law Student Association of New York University for their support.

It is a great honor for Crossroads to help present *Is it Possible to Live This Way?*, the latest book by Monsignor Luigi Giussani to be published in English, in the context of such a lively debate topic as the relationship between faith and reason. Our cultural center finds its inspiration in the life of Communion and Liberation, the Roman Catholic movement founded by Monsignor Giussani, who passed away almost 3 years ago. Father Giussani always emphasized that a lived faith must generate a new culture. Then-Cardinal Ratzinger reminded us of this aspect of the charism of CL when, a few months before he was elected Pope, he said *"The great contribution of Communion and Liberation derives above all from being a movement that carries a great human culture, theological but also general. (A movement) that nourishes today's cultural life with a Catholic expression of culture ... faithful to the great constants of the Catholic tradition but renewed in today's cultural world."* These words summarize perfectly the ideal that animates our activities here in New York.

Those who knew Father Giussani are aware of his love for music, and of the role that beauty played in his life. Thus, we thought that there could be no better way to open tonight's reflections than by listening to a piece of music on the piano. Chris Vath has kindly agreed to play for us a short piece by Brahms "Intermezzo." I think you may be interested to know that Mr. Vath, besides directing the Choir of Communion and Liberation, had the privilege two years ago of playing the piano for the Pope himself at his summer residence. Let's welcome Mr. Vath.

[MUSIC]

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 to introduce our distinguished guests and start the discussion.

Albacete: Alright. Former male model for surgical hose and part-time governor of Nevada.

No one would have told us when we began to put together this event, the two public events that would coincide with or be expressions of what we were discussing among ourselves in the National Convention of Communion and Liberation. It was clear that with the coming book of Fr. Giussani, there were really three books, the first dedicated to faith, it was clear that we were going to be immediately fascinated and run into the question of faith and reason. And so we began to plan this event in order to explore that relationship. Little did we know that we would finally have a beautiful moment like this with such distinguished guests on the very day that over 200,000 people met in St. Peter's Square in Rome as a gesture of support and concern to the Holy Father, the pope, because he was not welcome to speak at the Roman university of La Sapienza on what subject? Faith and Reason, presumably faith and scientific reason. Again, totally independent from that, we had put together this presentation and I am thinking it's almost uncanny how it fits perfectly this moment.

Our first speaker will be Prof. Robert Pollack, that man here...Let's see...there are many things you have done. But the most important is that he is my friend, a friend of ours. He has been Professor of Biological Sciences at Columbia University since 1978, the Director of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion since 1999, Lecturer at the Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research since 1998, Adjunct Professor for Science and Religion at Union Theological Seminary since 2002, Adjunct Professor of Religion since 2002, was Dean of Columbia College from 1982-1989. He received the Alexander Hamilton Medal from Columbia University and held a Guggenheim Fellowship. He has been a member of the Century Association since 1997. Look, this goes on forever! Alright, I resign; I'm leaving. To read this I have to wear sunglasses.

Pollack: There is an old saying from Vaudeville, "Never follow a banjo act with another banjo act." So let me just begin by thanking Lorenzo and Crossroads and Communion and Liberation for being included in this distinguished and, for me, novel group.

The four of us are different enough in our backgrounds and our worlds of expertise, to put us at risk of a trivial debate, whether between two scientists and two humanists, or between two Catholics and two Jews. Fortunately, the title of this panel assures us that debate is unnecessary, and even inappropriate.

The question "Can faith broaden reason?" is of such great intrinsic importance, and the risk implied by the possibility that the answer is "no" is so great, that simply to have us each explain why the answer is "yes," is well worth the time and effort it must have taken to bring us together for this event.

Because this question lies at the boundary of the knowable and the unknowable, both my faith and my science are challenged by the question.

The unknowable as a notion does not come easily to the scientifically-minded. Science works at the boundary of the known and the *unknown*, a different place entirely. Dealing with the unknowable is a project full of paradox, requiring that one talk about the inarticulatable and anatomize the unmeasurable. I have chosen to work at this boundary nevertheless, because I have the habits of thought of a scientist.

As soon as the notion of the unknowable as distinct from the unknown placed itself before me, the shock changed both my career and the way I see the world. The unknown was the raw material of my career, and the notion that it might be bounded in this way seemed to me deeply subversive of the entire enterprise.

Science proceeds by the testing of hypotheses, that is, ideas subject to disproof by testing of the natural world. A hypothesis that can stand up to testing expands the territory of the known, but the testability presents a problem: scientific hypotheses about the unknowable are by definition not meaningful.

Put another way, it is not worth a moment of anyone's time to seek the proof through science of any religious belief. So, I need first to provide some working terminology for the unknowable, without calling upon the tools of scientific hypothesis-testing.

Ask any scientist what lies at the core of her work, you will learn that it is not the experimental test of the hypothesis – although that is where most of the time and money of science go. It is the idea, the mechanism, the insight that justifies all the rest of the work of science. The moment of insight that reveals the new idea, where an instant before there was just fog, is the moment when the unknown first retreats before the creativity of the scientist.

Here, then, is the first door into the unknowable: where does scientific insight come from? Surely from someplace currently unknown. Let us consider the possibility that scientific insight, like religious revelation, comes from an intrinsically unknowable place.

It is a safe bet that working scientists would agree to the notion that there is a lot we don't know yet, and that the boundary between the known and unknown which science pushes back is the shoreline of a small island floating in a vast sea of the unknown. Let us say – make the further hypotheses – that the sea of unknown is not the edge of everything, and that the unknown itself is wholly bounded, blurring into an intrinsically inaccessible and immeasurable unknowability.

Then science would still be increasing the territory available to the world of the understood. As the length and complexity of the shoreline with the unknown grew in step with every discovery, there would still be no edge to the unknown except the unknowable. The enterprise of science would be assured of a limitless future of successes, none of them ever bringing the unknowable any closer.

Can these hypotheses – that the unknowable exists, and that it will remain unknowable – be tested through the methods of science? Certainly not, as they posit notions that resist testability. But they are nevertheless a fair representation of world-wide human experience outside of science. More to the point today, they are, as well, consistent with the actual experience of scientists, if not the institutional ideology of organized science.

I can anticipate the response of some to what I have said so far: to beg the question. The unknowable is not a category that gives itself easily to demonstration of its existence. If it were a mental quirk only, a fantasy not worth worrying about, an idea of something that cannot be, then that would be a sufficient answer: No unknowable, no problem. The problem with that glib answer is, that science itself depends on the periodic emergence of the unknowable for its own progress.

There is no way to think through a good idea in advance; insight is not a phenomenon subject to prior scientific analysis. At every instant of insight, every moment of Aha!, what had not been conceivable, becomes clear. Where was the idea before it was thought? Only afterward, once it was thought, can science begin the determination of the known from the unknown, using the idea as a guide. But before it was thought, there were no tasks, no path, no idea that there was even a question to ask.

The unknowable is worth a scientist's attention if for no other reason than that it is the source of insight, the irrational part of science that has no chance of being brought under rational control. Moments of insight in science are not reproducible, nor is their occurrence modeled by any hypothesis of its own.

As scientific insight cannot be harnessed to the engine of experimental testing, each occurrence may as well be a gift from an unknowable source. Good ideas emerge in the mind of a scientist as gifts of the Unknowable. They are not, as data are, simply trophies of a struggle with the unknown.

The essence of the disprovable is reproducibility; insight is by definition not a reproducible thing. Recall how few such ideas have come to any of us in the hundreds of years we have been trying to understand the world and ourselves through science. Yet without moments of insight that emerge from nowhere,

science bogs down in mindless repetition of acts that look serious but cannot be in the service of anything except confirmation of what is already known.

Scientific insight is not the only example of such a gift from the unknowable. Other events — also occurring rarely, inexplicably, unpredictably — can give meaning to our lives, just as scientific insights can explain the world outside ourselves. By meaning, in this context, I mean a new understanding drawn from the internal, emotional content of the experience, not the intellectual understanding which may follow as it does when experimentation proves a scientific insight to be useful. Meaning, purpose, teleology, the end of things: these are not notions that we naturally associate with science. Such experiences are commonly called religious.

Yet the central event in science — the sudden insight through which we see clearly to a corner of what had been unknown — is so similar to these religious experiences, that I see only a semantic difference between scientific insight and what is called, in religious terms, revelation. That difference remains small, whether one says that insight or revelation both come from nowhere interesting, or that they come from the unknowable which surrounds all that can be known, or that they come from God.

The differences between science and religion which have crystallized and reified into a wall that separates the two do not lie in the semantic difference between insight and revelation. Whether prepared for or not, prophetic experiences and scientific insights will occur with similar rarity, irrationality and unpredictability. The real differences grow from the different uses made of scientific and revelatory insight.

In both, insight takes the form of a vision of an invisible and hidden mechanism. In science such insights are made into guides for learning how nature works, thereby reducing our ignorance of the world around us. Guiding the formation of religious obligation, revelatory insights are prerequisite to the rituals and observances of a religion, which ease the burden of living by lifting a felt ignorance of the purpose and meaning of our mortal lives.

In all organized religions I am aware of, revelation takes the form of a sense of being overwhelmed by sheer feeling, arising within without reason nor cause. Just as a scientist prepares for insight by deep immersion in the study of what has been dragged out of the unknown by her predecessors, a person adept at religious insight — a holy person, a prophetic person — may prepare by study of earlier revelation and prophesy, and by trying to be alert to the moral or lesson taught through what might be — to an unfeeling observer — just a coincidence.

Though both science and religion presume that the territory of the unknown is vast, most religions are far more comfortable with the notion of a residue of unknowability than are most sciences. Many practicing scientists instead believe — they would say they know — that what is not known today must and will be known tomorrow, or the next day, and that this will go on until everything is known.

The notion that nothing exists except what is knowable is wholly unprovable. Holding on to this belief in the absence of any way to test it through experimentation, and despite the counter-evidence of scientific insight itself, puts science at the risk of trapping itself in dogma. Like the worst of religious dogmas, the insistence that everything is knowable, is an unprovable position taken in the face of the evidence of the natural world. In this case, the evidence includes the fact of uncontrollable insight as the wellspring of scientific discovery.

Some scientists will argue that the reproducibility of scientific experiments assures that science as an enterprise can always be brought to internal consistency, while religions, free to call upon individual revelation and unreproducible, miraculous events, necessarily fall into contradiction with one another and thereby cancel any reason for a sensible person to take any of them as seriously.

In a negative template of this position, many people of faith will argue that science is a fragmented enterprise unable to paint a coherent picture of the natural world, limited by conflicting and inconsistent models and the finite limits of a mortal mind.

Though many scientists cannot really accept that anyone could believe in a way around mortality, and though many religious persons cannot really believe that any serious person could fail to experience these feelings, some people – I am one of them – choose to carry both sets of thoughts at once.

In my 1999 book “The Missing Moment” I concluded that current scientific studies of the brain and the mind required us to acknowledge that science has an irrational component, and that scientists are likely to experience this irrationality as the same waves of awe, joy, fear or wonder that can overtake a religious person, or even the “oceanic experience” of a shared, external, unknowable presence which Freud protested too much that he could not feel.

The barrier erected by scientists who push aside, deny or ignore these irrational states of mind is an artificial, unnecessary one, built on denial of the reality that their own work depends upon uncontrollable and unpredictable moments of insight. The same artificial barrier is maintained from the other side with equal futility, each time the resultant discoveries of science are denied, ignored or pushed aside by people anxious to protect the same irrational states of mind so precious to them in their religious faith.

To dismantle the wall from both sides, both camps will have to admit what they must already know: the reality of irrational inward experience. They both will have to acknowledge it as the source of the unexpected and unpredictable insight upon which both organized science and organized religion depend. Such admissions will not come easily. Characters like me are not at all used to putting religious feelings in the foreground, and rather have the habit of pushing our feelings away, repressing them into unconscious reservoirs from which they may emerge, but where they do not interfere with the dream of lucid rationality.

This makes speaking about religious feelings in an academic setting particularly tricky. Scientists and others who use their powers of repression to avoid accepting the reality of religious feeling or even its origin in the natural world, tend to have great difficulty accounting for such feelings even in themselves. Not just moments of insight and revelation but other feelings as well – emotional states that overtake one, unbidden and unplanned by conscious rational anticipation – seem to be a different order of phenomena than those easily studied under reproducible conditions; it is extremely difficult to do a controlled experiment on feelings.

In terms of the expected behavior of scientists, strong feelings as such are also in bad taste. Data have to be examined in terms of the model they test, and models as well as data have to be able to stand on their own in the eyes of other scientists. This situation too has its mirror image in organized religion, where a spontaneous feeling of disbelief or doubt in the face of incomprehensible evil or simple bad luck may not be easily squared with the presumption that we are moral beings in a moral universe. Nor can all of the unwanted strong feelings associated with love, aggression, nor of course death, be fitted into most religious frameworks of expected right conduct. Too much doubt is as much in bad taste from a religious person as is too much enthusiasm from an overeager experimenter.

And yet we find ourselves free to make these choices, awkward as we may feel in doing so. Judaism places a high value on the reality of such uses of free will. The entire framework of Jewish understanding of our place in the world, our responsibilities to God, and to each other, is built upon the unique human capacity to make irrational choices as well as calculated decisions. Decisions may be made by many species, and the selective advantage of brain wired for logic is plain, but only a person can make a choice despite calculation, rather than because of it.

In the Jewish tradition the God who has existed before time and the universe began, created both time and the universe in order to have, in time, creatures – the word means things created – with free will, who could then choose to say thanks for their and the world’s existence. For thanks to be proper and meaningful – the proper form of thanks is to bless God – these creatures would need absolute free will to choose whether or not to do so.

Hence the unavoidability of randomness, accidents, and for that matter evil in religious terms: all must be allowed to result, whether by the wrong human choice or by truly random occurrence, because to allow any to be preventable by pre-determining human choice, would be to gut the purpose of the creation. The absolute requirement of human free will in this religious vision shifts human choice into the foreground, and mechanisms of natural selection which yield a person who can make the unexpected choice into the background.

This set of unprovable assumptions — so bizarre in their distance from anything reproducibly known through science and yet so familiar in their high regard for the critical step of insight in science — validates meaning and purpose in a living world which is the product of the uncaring, ever-changing, always-imperfect processes of natural selection.

This line of argument is articulated beautifully in Adin Steinsaltz’s book "The Strife of the Spirit," in the essay “Fate, Destiny and Free Will.” I had not yet read his essay when he and I first talked about these matters. I had just read an earlier article by Richard Dawkins, and was quite astounded by his capacity to reduce religious thought to an especially successful kind of ideational parasite. Rabbi Steinsaltz’s answer was to give me a reference to his essay, with the passing remark: “God says, ‘Get Me a thinking creature, I don’t care how.’”

In specifically Jewish terms, then, it is the God-given, inexplicable reality of free will that allows us to act well — or not. That choice – available not just to Jews but to all people as their birthright – makes us all the active determiners of our fate. Pain, suffering, unreasonable maldistribution of good and bad fate: these are the very stuff of the natural world, the visible expression of the random genetic variation which provides natural selection with the eerie capacity to produce some living thing that will survive any contingency.

It is my faith that informs me of my obligation as a scientist to use my own free will to work against these deepest mechanisms of the natural world, and thereby to work against the meaninglessness of these mechanisms.

To restate this answer to the question before us in concrete and current terms, I argue that scientists of faith have the obligation to “broaden reason” by working together to assure that their science is put to the amelioration of injustice, and to the creation and protection of those freedoms prerequisite to the free-will choice to treat one another with love.

Dr. Martin Luther King, whose birthday we honor tomorrow as a long-delayed National Holiday, taught this in a speech delivered forty years ago, on April 4, 1967 at a meeting of “Clergy and Laity Concerned” at Riverside Church:

“We must rapidly begin...we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

”A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand, we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and

robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”

Thank you.

Albacete: Our next speaker, Professor Joseph Weiler, is at home here. He's a professor at NYU. If you saw that list I had before, this just goes beyond anything reasonable...

Weiler: My mother is not here, Msgr., so we can dispense with the list!

Albacete: This is unknowable!

Professor has been asked to share with us his impression on the topic from more or less two perspectives. One is his knowledge of the Jewish faith and tradition that he has spoken to us so eloquently on other occasions both here and in our activities in Milan, and also with his expertise in international law. This is an area where this is a very important topic because the question of reason and truth keeps popping up in the attempts to construct an ethical system, an ethical basis for international legislation and respect for human rights that is not entirely abandoned to the power of the state or of the society. This is a very great concern, and Prof. Weiler has been at the center and is at the center of a world-wide debate about this.

So Professor, sorry if I don't read the rest of this stuff; we're anxious to hear you.

Weiler: Thank you very much Msgr.

I pray to the God of Israel, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart please You, my Lord and Redeemer.

The tension between reason and faith which has been expounded philosophically and epistemologically brilliantly by Professor Pollack, has also a political and social dimension. In the West, religion is under attack, more in Europe than in the United States; very often the instrument of the attack consists in a variety of claims that to be religious, to profess religion is in some way a sign of abandonment of the ideals of reason, of rationality et cetera. We have all read the plethora of books that have been published in the last two or three years and have become not only best-sellers but veritable crowd pleasers. In and of itself a fact of some interest. In America when something becomes Showbusiness, a certain threshold is crossed) In Europe, it is a different kind of show business, tinged with the memories of the Anni di Piombo and *the* frisson of violence, when were treated to this curious and ignoble spectacle just last week when the Pope who was invited to give the inaugural lecture opening the academic year at La Sapienza University in Rome was prevented, with the never distant threat of violence, from speaking by those who protested, 'How could a person of faith be invited to speak at a secular university?' You use violence to insist on reason at a University called La Sapienza. The hypocritical – after the fact (!) -- reaction of the Powers that Be in Italy added insult to injury.

I'm not sure what my credentials are to speak on this topic. I am not a scientist, although Germans in the 19th Century invented the term "legal science" for law -- a pretty silly invention which helped take law out of the realm of the humanities with tragic results) But that silliness has something worth reflecting upon. If they didn't call it "legal science," somehow it would lose legitimacy as belonging in the realm of reason an early pointer to the emergence of "scientism" – the claim that the methods of the material sciences are the only way of employing reason as a way of knowing and reflecting rationally about the human condition, the world et cetera. Law, a discipline with an intellectual tradition of thousands of years had to appropriate the word "science" in order to self-legitimate itself.

My first proposition is to adapt the pregnant maxim : “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” “Render unto science the things which are Sciences and render unto religion or metaphysics and the things that are theirs. The most important thing is to understand the boundaries of what science can and cannot explain. That is why this talk we just heard by Professor Pollack was so illuminating. As a Jew I never had a problem with the story of the creation or of the earth being round or moving around the sun because I never understood Scripture as a book of science. It instructs me in other aspects of life. It’s not geography neither geology or paleontology; And although ever single Sabbath when the Torah is brought out I pray for the sick, as I do three times a day in my daily prayer. When I, or my wife, or my children are sick, I take them to a doctor, not to a rabbi. That is not a lack of faith. It is an understanding of what the appropriate realms of our interaction in this world.

Indeed in a post-Holocaust world I’m very tempted to be modest in what I can say about the providence of God as regards the fate of individual subjects. We should be very timid in making any statement in that regard lest we blaspheme inadvertently. Likewise the debate about creationism is of little interest to me. I would be appalled if my kids, in their science class, were taught anything other than evolutionism, although a good science teacher would explain the limitations of Darwinism, outlining what it tries to explain and explaining what it is it cannot explain. And there is a lot it cannot explain at its core; and though I would not expect the science teacher to jump onto the bridge of Intelligent Design; I would not want him or her either to foreclose spiritual or cognitive or epistemic positions which science should not foreclose.

Most important I would expect a good science teacher to oppose scientism,. Scientism is the notion that anything that we cannot know through the material paradigms which science explore and which does not fall into the methodologies of scientific enquiry, just becomes a matter of opinion, a matter of belief, a matter of faith, and should not in and of itself be the subject of rigorous reflection, rational methodology in short subject to reasoned discourse about truth. A case can be made that the most wide-spread religion in the West, and maybe beyond the West, is not Christianity, Islam or Judaism, or whatever; it’s scientism, this notion that the only thing worth knowing and possibly to know is that which science defines as its legitimate inquiry, the material world with its wonderful instruments, and anything beyond that is just New Age beliefs with the temptation of epistemic skepticism, the moral relativism.

A little footnote for the three or four Jews who might be here: the greatest challenge of science to Jewish faith is the science that relates to the origin of Scripture—a challenge which is less acute for Christianity. I mention this because there is also a tendency of compartmentalization among religious people, a fear of submitting to critical inquiry certain articles of faith, certain proposition on which faith is based. Why do I mention this? And you see, I’m being very delicate. I say this as something that happens only amongst the Jews. It’s because they’ve internalized scientism, because they themselves have come to believe that when rigorous thinking is something that happens in the sphere of science, and then when we move to religion, it’s a kind of free-for-all. Not good.

There are at least two types of arrogance which characterize these debates. One is the one that I’ve mentioned i.e. scientism—the only truth which is worthwhile considering, the only method of searching truth which is worthwhile pursuing is that which my colleague explained is within the confines of science, and beyond that it’s neither truth nor method, etc...

There’s also a certain arrogance of the religious person who believes that religion has a monopoly over moral discourse; who believes that religion has a monopoly over spirituality. Both propositions are hopelessly wrong. We have to acknowledge that there might be Atheists, Agnostics, confirmed secular people who can develop and reason a morality which is not rooted in deity.; we do not have the monopoly

of moral propositions as religious people, nor do we have a monopoly over spirituality. Here again, Professor Pollack so clearly defined the boundary between the knowable and the unknowable, recognizing the unknowable and recognizing the ineffable. It is not necessarily associated with religion, at least as we understand religion as expressed in the Judeo-Christian tradition. And yet there can be a spiritual existence, and we religious people should not be arrogant to imagine it if somebody does not see the world through our spectacle, in some way they are not spiritual people, they are just on the other side of limiting themselves to science and materialism. That too is a form of arrogance.

Catholicism, perhaps the rest of Christianity of course equates the principle imperatives of life with natural law attainable by reason; it's a breath-taking radical position that was expressed by the current Pope in his famous Regensburg lectures. It's breath-taking radical because he subjects his own religion to the discipline of reason. It has to be said, human reason, a conundrum which is not impossible, but not easy to distance. It's a delicate question. The audacity of that position cannot escape attention.

Judaism and also Islam have a normativity which extends beyond that, beyond the precepts of natural law. There's nothing intrinsically ethically bad in eating pig; we don't eat it because we're commanded not to eat it. It's just that we are not you and are commanded not to eat it. (Sometimes I have these fantasies that some scroll is found in the Dead Sea and it turns out that it's all been a mistake; it's YOU guys who are not allowed to eat all that good stuff....)

These differences, the fact that the Jewish imperative goes beyond natural law and morality and ethics plays a role in the interaction of the two religions in the public place. Not every interdiction of the Jewish code is per se immoral as is the case with most Catholic interdictions. You have a tougher time with some of the big issues of our time because per se they are immoral, which is not exactly the same for us. But both religions find common ground and are clearly remote from secular culture and from the scientific paradigm, (and I'm not saying to be a scientist is to be a secularist, of course not) in the concept of sanctity, holiness.

Sanctity and holiness are the unique variables of religion; not morality, not spirituality as such—spirituality as understood as the non-material dimensions of the world we live in. But sanctity and holiness are the unique provenance and province and vocabulary of religion which simply has no equivalent in secular discourse.. It's not the exaltation you feel when you listen to music, which is very exalting.

Now, contrary to many, the whole idea of sanctity and holiness is not a category in which we can speak or we must speak entirely in esoteric terms and cannot be discussed in a reasoned discipline and a discipline of reason. I'm not saying that if I speak about sanctity and holiness in a reasoned discipline and a discipline of reason, any reasonable person has to be persuaded. I'm not going to say that. We are, as we heard, beyond the boundary of the knowable; But what I would claim, and it's a minimalist claim, that the world, even the world which is not religious, is enriched by listening carefully to the discipline of reason and the reasoned discipline in which religious people talk about the category of sanctity and holiness. It is for even the non-religious person a richer world. I want to give some examples and conclude with those examples with your permission.

Let me give you what might seem at first a very trivial example and then let me give you a more profound example. So we share, religious and not religious, a big debate about the precautionary principle. Should society assume that things are safe until they are proven to be unsafe, or can society, based on the precautionary principle assume that things are unsafe until they're proved safe. Look how much better the world would be if we had assumed that cigarette smoking was unsafe until it was proven safe, rather than the other way around. If you go into the literature of the precautionary principle the paradigm of that

discourse is risk and utility. So even the most skeptical and prudent person in relation to, say, artificial genomes, if to his or her satisfaction it could be shown that there's absolutely no danger, he or she would say, well, in that case, I drop my opposition. Those are the terms of the debate. But a religious person may come in, not every religious person, and may take the imperative from Genesis to be custodian of the earth and the sanctity of those creatures created by God and say that it's not a utilitarian paradigm; to us, it's not simply about risk; it's about a certain custodianship which works on a different paradigm. You can accept it or you don't have to accept it. Even as religious persons you don't have to accept it, but that is a category of sanctity which is not utilitarian and it's hard for me to believe that somebody will say the debate, the discussion, the depth with which we understand our relation to this world is not enriched by that kind of insight.

Let's take something that perplexes many non-Jews—attachment to commandments which seem to have little reason and no deep moral basis, and seem to be legalistic, etc...The rules about *kashrut*. People have told me that the healthiest food and the tastiest food is seafood. I can't eat it. And the very strict rules about the Sabbath. It's not simply a spiritual day of rest. It's a day when certain things cannot be done. You cannot work. And some of the Jewish rules of sexuality to do, not with adultery, but with abstinence within marriage, around the period of a woman's menstruation. What is this? What is this about? Arid legalism according to St Paul? It has to do with sanctity. It has to do with holiness. These rules come in that very chapter of Scripture, Leviticus, which has the great moral imperative, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." If we think deeply about it, it's not simply that through those things about eating and working and the life of love and sex, three things which dominate our daily existence, I am reminded again and again about my connection to the Almighty by what Don Giusani called the Event, which for us is Sinai.

It also defines a different relationship of a human being in the world because in that perspective, if I eat everything that I see and my heart desires, in some deep respect, I'm a slave to my human condition. If every time the desire overcomes me and my wife we have sexual relations, I'm a slave to my human condition. If I put no restraints on the amount of time that I work to further my career, I'm a slave to one of the worst aspects of human conditions, hubris and ambition. And suddenly those three clusters of commandments which seem so ridiculous and so archaic become the basis for a theory of liberty. I submit myself to something outside this world in order to be sovereign in this world, even sovereign over my human corporal condition.

Now I don't expect that everybody or anybody in this room, many people here are religious, would accept that proposition. Nor do I expect that anybody of my secular, Atheist friends would accept this. But I would almost imagine a measure of bad faith if they said, "This does not give pause; this is not an interesting thought about the position of humans in this world." That kind of reasoned discipline and disciplined reason around the category of sanctity suddenly leads us to an insight about the condition of the human being in this world which maybe one would not have had without that, even with a deeply humanistic tradition, for example Antiquity and the Enlightenment.

I want to end with one proposition about religion. Sometimes we are too polite to each other. Sometimes, less in this country, but certainly in Europe, certainly in the West—I think it was the pope before he was pope that said, "Christianity is become a minority religion." So when we feel under attack, we feel that as religious people we should unite. But that is one of the reasons I appreciated so much the speech of the pope in Regensburg. He had the courage to say the fact that because you qualify something as religious does not mean that everything that is done in the name of that religion should be acceptable. Even if it's qualified as religion it should be subject to the discourse of reason and to reasoned discourse.

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.

Albacete: Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Fr. Julián Carrón.

Carrón: First I would like to put Giussani's book into the context of the present situation. This situation can be characterized by two things.

First of all, the reduction of religion to feeling and ethics. For a majority of people religion has nothing to do with reality. Religion has to do with a nebulous feeling in relationship with the divine. Such a feeling is difficult to identify, because what I feel in front of the Mystery is not easy to grasp and one person might have it and another might not. Therefore for a majority of people religion has nothing to do with the knowledge of reality. For them religion is not related with reason.

This can explain the second characteristic of the present situation, which is confusion. The modern world had surrendered regarding the possibility of knowing. This can seem strange at a time when science prevails. But this negative attitude with regard to knowledge and a high emphasis of science are not contradictory. Recently the Pope spoke about the resignation of western civilization before reality.

“Our faith opposes decisively the resignation that considers man incapable of truth, as if this would be too much for him. This resignation before the truth is, in my opinion, the nucleus of the Western crisis. If there is no truth, man is incapable of distinguishing between good and evil.”

What this resignation means has been clarified last Thursday by the same Benedict XVI in his talk to the Sapienza University of Rome:

“The danger facing the Western world ... is that man today, precisely because of the immensity of his knowledge and power, surrenders before the question of truth. This means that, in the end, reason gives way before the pressure of other interests and the lure of efficiency, and is forced to recognize this as the ultimate criterion.”

The result is confusion.

In this state of affairs religion is thrown outside of reality. It is considered a phenomenon nearer to a virtual world than to the real one. Consequently for many people faith is like believing in ghosts.

When Giussani wrote this book, the situation was not yet as clear as it is for us now, but his genius could recognize the signs of the times, and now we are living through these times. For this reason this book can give us an amazing insight into an understanding of the context in which we are called to live our Christian faith and how to face it.

The reduction of faith to a sentimental experience is directly addressed by Giussani in this book:

“Let me also say a word about the most precious value that serves as the leitmotiv of the entire text, the passion that, in fact, determines it, from chapter to chapter. That is the gift that I received when I entered a high school to teach religion. Teaching religion gave me this intuition and this passion. The intuition is that faith first and foremost needs to demonstrate that it is reasonable. Indeed that it is the most reasonable thing there is, and thus, the most human thing there is. Because reason is that level of nature in which nature becomes conscious of itself and this is called the “I.” This has two pre-eminent characteristics. First of all, the dynamism of reason to grasp the richness of life: the modalities by which reason turns itself upside down and by which it arms itself for contact with reality, with all of reality, without excluding anything, are called “methods.” The problem of faith first of all should be discovered as a problem of “method.”

Secondly, in addition to this living mobility, reason is the demand, the passion and demand to know everything, the totality. An aware faith flows suddenly, providentially, graciously, fortuitously, precisely from this passion for totality in knowledge that is the fundamental characteristic of reason. A living reason is a totalizing reason.”

On this occasion, we focus our attention on faith, on Christian faith. To understand what Giussani means by faith as a method of knowledge, it might be useful to stop for a moment to explore what it means to know reality. This can help to grasp the relationship between reality and reason.

The Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri writes:

“What is proper of reason is not its presumed evidence, not its empirical or logical rigor, but it is above all the force of the impression of reality, according to which profound reality imposes itself coercively on the sensitive intellect. (...) Therefore, the problem of reason does not consist of verifying if it is possible for reason to reach reality, but quite the contrary. The real question is: How should we keep ourselves in the reality where we already are? It is not a question of coming to be in reality, but of not going out of it.”

But the impression of reality does not leave reason indifferent. In front of reality, reason is the need for totality, for total meaning. Reality acts on reason as an unavoidable invitation to discover the meaning of reality that impresses us. To block this dynamic is to block knowledge.

“Reality presents itself to me in a way that solicits me to pursue something else... Reality solicits me to engage in a search for some other thing, something beyond immediate appearances. It latches on to my consciousness, enabling it to pre-sense and perceive something else. Faced with the sea, the earth, the sky, and all things moving within them, I am not passive – I am animated, moved, and touched by what I see. And this motion is towards a search for something else.”

This conception, which is one of the crucial points in Giussani’s book *The Religious Sense*, can be found as an intuition in some of the most moving literary and poetical expressions, like Eugenio Montale’s formula, “Beneath the dense blue sky, seabirds flash by, never pausing, driven by images below: Farther, farther.” And this image used by Shakespeare: “Show me a mistress that is passing fair / What doth her beauty serve, but as a note / Where I may read who pass’d that passing fair?”

This dynamic of the sign is not complete, Giussani teaches us, if it does not reach its maximum outcome, that is, the acknowledgment, full of astonishment, of the existence of the Mystery that makes all things. “The summit of reason’s conquest is the perception of an unknown unreachable presence, to which all human movement is destined, because it depends upon it. It is the idea of mystery.” “The world is a sign. Reality calls us on to another reality. Reason, in order to be faithful to its nature and to the nature of such a calling, is forced to admit the existence of something else underpinning, explaining everything.” It is following the dynamic of reason and set in motion by the impression of reality that makes us capable of knowing reality.

Religion, reality and reason are inseparable. These things illuminate each other reciprocally. In his lecture at the University of Regensburg, Pope Benedict XVI challenged everyone to a “broadening of our concept of reason and its application.” What does it mean to broaden reason? It means nothing other than living religion, that is, recognizing the Mystery in reality. What is religion? It is the apex of reason. Therefore, reason does not fulfill its true nature as reason if it does not open itself to religion; and religion remains a mere sentiment unless it coincides with our rational nature. John Paul II said so in an interview quoted in *Fides et Ratio*:

“When the *why* of things is investigated with integrity, seeking the totality, in the search for the ultimate and most complete answer, then human reason touches its apex and opens to religion. In effect, religiosity represents the most elevated expression of the human person, because it is the culmination of his rational nature.”

This is what prevents us from reducing reason and religion to any of the number of reductions in use among us, in our culture, that influence us as well.

Christian faith has to do with reality. The claims of Christian faith is that the divine, the Mystery became man. In Jesus of Nazareth “the mystery which was kept secret for long ages – says Saint Paul – ... is now disclosed and ... is made known to all nations” (Rm 16: 25).

Because of this reason has to do with a real person whom we can know. This is the conviction that all Christians recognize in the words of the Apostle John:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1: 4).

Let us move on to think about faith as an indirect method of knowledge.

Since Christian faith is to recognize an historical event which happened 2000 years ago, what method do we need to recognize this event? “Method” means the way of doing something. There are two methods of knowledge: direct knowledge and indirect knowledge. Direct knowledge is by means of my own experience, whereas indirect knowledge relies on what someone else tells me. While the instrument for direct knowledge is within me, the instrument for indirect knowledge is outside of me: this instrument is the witness. Indirect knowledge is the method of knowledge used in the courtroom. (Cf. Giussani, *Traces*, Dec. 2007 booklet)

What method can be applied to the knowledge of a historical event? The only way to grasp *any* historical event in which I didn’t participate is through an indirect method of knowledge, through a witness. This is called faith. Faith then is a natural method of knowledge, a method of indirect knowledge, a knowledge that comes through the mediation of a witness.

Culture, history and human social life are founded on this type of knowledge which is called faith, knowledge of reality through the mediation of a witness. If you get rid of this mediated knowledge, you get rid of the whole of human culture, because all human culture bases itself on the fact that a person starts off from what someone else who went before him has learned and then goes ahead.

Let us hear what Alexis de Tocqueville says of that method of knowledge in his work *Democracy in America*:

“If man were forced to demonstrate for himself all the truths of which he makes daily use, his task would never end. He would exhaust his strength in preparatory demonstrations without ever advancing beyond them. As, from the shortness of his life, he has not the time, nor, from the limits of his intelligence, the capacity, to act in this way, he is reduced to take on trust a host of facts and opinions which he has not had either the time or the power to verify for himself, but

which men of greater ability have found out, or which the crowd adopts. On this groundwork he raises for himself the structure of his own thoughts; he is not led to proceed in this manner by choice, but is constrained by the inflexible law of his condition. There is no philosopher in the world so great but that he believes a million things on the faith of other people and accepts a great many more truths than he demonstrates.”

Applying these insights to democracy, Tocqueville concludes:

“Thus the question is not to know whether any intellectual authority exists in an age of democracy, but simply where it resides and by what standard it is to be measured¹.”

This method is the most important of all the methods used by reason, because this method involves the whole person in knowledge, not only reason, as the other method does. Why? Because you need to trust the witness. In order to trust a person in a just and reasonable way, you need to commit yourself with all the honesty of your person, you need to apply the acumen of observation, your love for truth. For this reason, it is the most precious method.

But is knowledge by means of the witness a reliable method of knowledge? To know through a witness is a reliable method of knowledge whether we can be certain about the credibility of the witness. If this is the case, this method of knowledge is as certain as any other. How can I know that what he witnesses is true?

Giussani himself asks this question and offers an answer:

“If there’s something beyond our horizon, that’s impossible to overcome, when we reach the threshold where reality becomes an unknown by its very nature, when we reach the threshold of what is called “mystery,” only this method [to know through a witness] can let us know something of the mystery. How can we verify the truth of what we know of the mystery through the witness of someone who comes from beyond the last line, who enters into the human world? How can we know if what this person reveals to us is right? We’ll only know it if the human person flourishes. If it causes to flourish everything that is human, then it is confirmed as true.” (Fr. Giussani, *Traces*, Dec. 2007 booklet).

How can we know Christ? Among the two methods used by reason we had hinted at, the only one that applies is faith. We do not know Christ directly, neither by evidence, nor by analysis of our experience. The only method which allows us to know Christ is through a witness that makes him present now. “Christ’s relevance [contemporaneity] for people of all times is shown forth in his body, which is the Church².” It is Christ’s contemporaneity, his presence to us today, that allows me to verify the truth of the Christian claim. This is the only hypothesis faithful to the nature of the Christian event as we can recognize it in history.

If we look at the first time in history, in the chronological sense, when was the problem of Christ first posed?

“The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* trans. Henry Reeve (Cambridge, Mass.: Sever and Francis, 1863), vol. 2, 8–10.

² “La contemporaneità di Cristo all’uomo di ogni tempo si realizza nel suo corpo, che è la Chiesa” (*Veritatis Splendor* 25).

staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.” (John 1: 36–38)

For the first two that followed Jesus, John and Andrew, what is the first characteristic of the faith that they had in Jesus? The first characteristic is a fact! It is a fact that had the characteristic of an encounter. “The encounter with an objective event, absolutely independent of the person who has the encounter.” The first characteristic of the Christian faith is that it starts off from a fact, a fact that has the form of an encounter.

What is the second characteristic? The second characteristic is the exceptional nature of the fact. When can we call something exceptional? Something is exceptional when it corresponds to the deepest needs of our heart. To find an exceptional man means to find a man who brings about a correspondence with what you are longing for, with the need for justice, truth, happiness, love. Something truly exceptional is something divine: it has something divine in it. If not, it doesn’t really bring us to God. “Exceptional” is synonymous with the word “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 one thing, you are tired, you are exhausted, and at a 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 third characteristic is wonder. His first two followers, John and Andrew, became friends of Jesus and started to see Jesus’ miracles. Let us imagine people who are witnesses of these things for days, weeks, months and years. Little by little they became more and more aware of the uniqueness of this man and they cannot avoid asking the question: “Who is He?”

This is the fourth factor. Christian faith begins precisely with this question: “Who is He?”

Last point: Responsibility before the fact. A fact which challenges reason and freedom.

To summarize: an encounter – strikes me in its exceptionality – solicits wonder – provokes the question “who is He?” – and challenges my reason and freedom.

In our experience there is something that comes from beyond: unforeseeable, mysterious, but within our experience. If it is unforeseeable, not immediately visible, mysterious, how do we grasp this Presence? We can grasp it with an instrument called faith. Let’s call this instrument “faith” in order to use a term that is not taken back and exhausted within the concept of reason – it is reason that recognizes our experience in its immediate factors – it is in experience that we feel the breath or the vibration or the consequences of a Presence that cannot be explained, that is a surprising encounter; therefore it is something beyond reason that can intuit and understand it, and we call this faith, which is an intelligence of reality, an intelligence of experience.

I said that faith is a form of knowledge that is beyond the limits of reason. Why is it beyond the limits of reason? Because it grasps something that reason cannot grasp: reason cannot perceive “the presence of Jesus among us,” “Christ is here now,” – reason cannot grasp this in the manner in which faith is capable of. Reason cannot *not* admit that He is here. Why? Because there is a factor here within that decides about this companionship, certain results of this companionship, certain resonances in this companionship, a factor so surprising that if I don’t affirm something other, I don’t give reason to the experience, because reason is to affirm experiential reality according to all the factors that make it up, all the factors. For example, we who fill this room right now come from completely different places and backgrounds; we have quite different temperaments and sensitivities. The fact that we are here now cannot be adequately

accounted for if we overlooked the fact that we were all moved by someone who made himself present in our lives and who is present among us now.

Maybe we only feel an echo of this factor, we feel the fruit of it, we even see the consequence, but we aren't able to see this factor directly; if I say: "So it doesn't exist," I am mistaken, because I eliminate something of my experience, and this is no longer reasonable.

Faith is an act of the intellect, the catechism says, it's an act of knowledge that grasps the Presence of something that reason would not know how to grasp, but that reason has to affirm nonetheless, otherwise something that is within our experience would be eluded, eliminated, something that our experience *indicates*; therefore in some undeniable way it is within it; it is inexplicable, but it is within it. Now of course, there is within me a capacity to understand, to know a level of reality that is greater than the usual; and I am obliged by reason to admit it: if I did not admit it I would not affirm all the factors that make up my experience.

To recognize this factor is the supportive nucleus of the entire conception of knowledge and of reality from the Christian point of view, the entire nucleus of Christian intelligence is here. It is necessary to appreciate this. It isn't a matter of understanding *how* Christ is here; it is necessary to understand that one is *obliged to affirm* that there is something else here, because we aren't able to simply explain what is here with an investigation, analysis or examination of our reason.

When John and Andrew watched Jesus speak, they felt there was something exceptional there; they were not able to realize – they did not understand how, that is, their reason was not capable of grasping it – however, in order to be reasonable, they were obliged to say: "There is something else there." Why? Because to be reasonable means to affirm reality according to the totality of its factors, and if one of these factors is exceptional, it is necessary to say that it's there, even if one doesn't understand how.

At the beginning of my talk I mentioned two characteristics of the present situation: the reduction of religion to feeling and ethics, and the surrender regarding the possibility of knowing. Giussani's approach to faith in the book *Is It Possible to Live Like This?* is an answer to both of these problems. In fact, if faith is a method of knowledge, then I can no longer deny that it is possible to know. By allowing me to recognize Christ today, who is the Mystery who became a man, the Mystery that is at the root of all of reality, I become interested in every aspect of reality, because everything and every event is a sign of Him. Thus skepticism and the disengagement with regard to knowledge are no longer a temptation.

If faith is a method of knowledge, then all the attempts to confine the Christian faith to spiritual or virtual phenomena of man's religious imagination, having nothing to do with the reality of everyday life, are pathetic. It is the attempt to confine Christianity to the world of dreams. Why isn't it a dream? Why wasn't it a dream two thousand years ago? Because His Presence is at work among us. "The Christian faith is the subversive and surprising way of living ordinary things," said Fr. Giussani. We verify that Christ is real, present, because He changes precisely the things that are most resistant to any change: the ordinary things. This intensity of living, the ineffable and total vibration in front of things and people, the density of the moment, in times when everything is flat, convinces us that Péguy was right when he wrote: "He is here. / He is here as on the first day. / He is in the midst of us as on the day of His death / Eternally every day. / He is here among us all the days of His eternity." (*The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc*)

Albacete: It's late. Really we don't have time for questions. Not even for mine. I want to know more about that "unknowable" bit. There's no clash...do they intersect? What do you call that?

Pollack: Is that a question?

Albacete: No, no. Think about it.

Albacete: I wanted to know from Dr. Weiler a little bit more about the role that tradition plays in knowledge of reality. I think this is very important and is somehow related. And I would ask Fr. Julian how it is related to our notion of experience, but for that you will have to stay tuned for the next program. All kinds of things happen.

The pope, as you know, had written his presentation at the University of La Sapienza, and so when he could not go, he sent it, and it was published around the world. I would like to end this meeting with the way he ends what he was going to say because I find that it expresses very well what has been in the heart of all of us who love so much putting something like this together. He talks about his own desire to play the following part in the great drama today about the future of civilization and the search for truth. The part he sees for him, for the Church, is to “sustain, to make as open the sensibility to the truth.” Let these not be something we don’t care about or for us a theoretical question no longer valuable. To the contrary, earlier he has spoken about it in virtue of a certain piety with respect to the majesty of the truth, to keep alive this love and sensitivity for the truth, “to invite always reason, again and again,” he says, “to continue in the research for the truth, for the good, for God, and along this way, to encourage it, to ask it, to hope, to invite it, to look from afar the lights along the line of history, the long history of the Christian faith, and to perceive in that way Jesus Christ as the light that illumines history and helps us find the true way towards the future.”

Thank you and good night.