



## From the Religious Sense to Christianity: The Fundamental Works of Msgr. Luigi Giussani Founder of Communion and Liberation

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THIRD LESSON: THE RELIGIOUS SENSE, RELIGIONS, AND THE HYPOTHESIS OF REVELATION

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PLACE: CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF POMPEII, 25 CARMINE STREET, NEW YORK

**Chris Bacich:** For those who were here perhaps for the first time, this is a course which was given by MG back in the 70's to a group of students at the University of Bologna and summarizes his main 3 works: "The Religious Sense", "At the origin of the Christian Claim" and "Why the Church?" All 3 of which have been published by Mc Gill Queen University Press and so I highly recommend to you these 3 works, if you find the content of these lectures to be provocative.

Just to recap, so far as MG does in his lesson, we have talked about 2 fundamental ideas, over the course of the last 2 lectures. The first we can call the nature of human reason and last week we had on this board a graph (Fig 1).

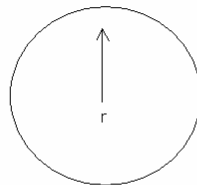


Fig.1

He draws a circle and he poses this circle as the horizon of our existence as human beings, this is the horizon of our human experience, what we can grasp, as we live, and he places us here in the center of the circle as the letter "r", there is a particular reason for that, he says that we can indicate with "r" the characteristics of our experience because even a cat has experience but a cat has no rational experience. What characterizes rational experience is the need for a final sense to things. Reason pushes one to the final horizon; the nature of reason is the religious sense. And so we said that as reason searches for an answer to the question of meaning, it goes in many directions, stopping here and there along the way, etc., often times getting stuck, energy always tends to attempt to finally penetrate and go beyond the horizon of human experience, the very horizon of rational experience, to go beyond. MG quotes the late Pope Paul VI from a pastoral letter that he

gave when he was still the Archbishop of Milan, saying that “the religious sense is the synthesis of the spirit”, the apex or the root of reason. And so MG says, we have observed a consequence of this dynamic, if man wants to be coherent, and if he wants to follow his nature as it pushes him in this direction, he should say “I got it”, nature pushes me beyond this, that is beyond that horizon of experience, beyond that limit that continually retreats, it pushes me to affirm an unknown, as the answer to my hunger, and my thirst for a final explanation.

Last week I told a story of the first time I kissed a girl, a girl that I met at a vacation and I said that, the next day she grabbed my hand and I had this sense that, whatever I was looking for in her, the day before, had somehow disappeared. And MG says, if we were reasonable and we have this kind of experience, we have to say that something must exist that we are really authentically looking for, even if, where it is, what it is, how it is, remains ultimately mysterious. He says, no one can avoid affirming the existence of that “X” that explains everything, no one can avoid the problem of the existence of something in the name of which he does everything he does. And so MG says, atheism, in the etymological sense of the word – that is, no god – is utter nonsense, it has no rational sense. Everyone, even for one hour, maybe for 15 days and then he perhaps he changes, has something for which he lives and works and acts at the bottom of it all. Last week we say that MG said, something for which he pays devotion, even it changes, 10 minutes from now, a year from now.

So this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> fundamental point we see in these lectures, the point of the mystery. MG says, can reason understand, can it grasp this final meaning, can reason comprehend that for which, in the final analysis, one lives? He says, look, if it can, it means that the final sense of things is reason itself. This is very important; it is a very true observation. If the final meaning of our existence as human beings is something that we can circumscribe with our reason, it means that reason is greater than it. It means that reason can understand all of its dynamic, which means in the final analysis the ultimate meaning of things is reason itself. This is man: master of the universe. For example, in one of the textbooks for a philosophy class in my high school that is currently being used, it says, “Man is the measure.” MG says that this idea that man is the measure is the presumption of all of modern culture. What’s fascinating here too, if we open up a little aside, is that post modern culture reveals that man is the measure, man as the measure of things, ultimately turns upon itself and destroys himself, because post-modern culture is nothing other than a final suspicion and doubt about reason itself, so then you come to utter fragmentation in human experience. MG says we saw that there is an answer but it is incomprehensible, ineffable, which is the same to say beyond, transcendent. Reviewing, for what we said last week, we found ourselves before this option: either we accept reneging on his own reason, as we claim that reason is fundamentally an absurdity, the search for meaning that unites everything in the final analysis of things almost justifies everything, clarifies everything, explains everything. Either this need is itself irrational, an absurdity, so that we have to affirm what the greatest existentialists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did: that life is absurdity, that existence is absurdity. MG uses this expression: I am an ill-made creature. Or, a person has the courage to say: I’m limited and the answer is beyond me. MG gives an example, he says: Imagine I’m in a room and in this room there is a painting and me and my friend are going into the room and I say to my friend, “Is any light in this room?” And my friend keeps looking at the painting and MG, imagine that you continue on, “Are you sure that there is light in this room?” And the friend, “Yes, can

you let me look at the picture?” Finally you say, “Prove to me there are lights in this room.” And he says there are 2 possibilities: one is that my friend gets me a ladder to show me there are lights in this room. But if my friend gets a ladder to show me that there are lights, it means that my friend is unreasonable as well, because if I can look at the painting, it means that there is light. And MG says, therefore, if one does not recognize the source of meaning and light, which is the mystery of God, the world would be, as quoted by Shakespeare, “a tale told by idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”. We also recalled from last week, that MG says that in various times in history, in particular in the past 3 or 4 hundred years, man believed he found this final sense of things, Hitler and Lenin both believed they grasped it in different ways, and so a particular is inflated to become the reason for everything and I have already said that this is what we call idol. We said last week that there is this drive in us to understand the final sense of things, to affirm a reason for everything, a reason which would justify breathing. Because that is the problem, let’s remember since the first lesson, MG says, look, I am not proposing a new set of ideas, I am proposing here an observation of human experience and I suggest to you, if you want, that you start with an observation of yourself in the present, now. Tell me if you don’t find within yourself, something that ultimately has to justify why you’re breathing now? This is why he says that atheism is nonsense. Every human being has a god because every human being breathes ultimately for some reason, indistinct and unconscious it may be; it’s there, it’s the thing that makes you get up in the morning. And he says, the problem is not having any idea of what this may be, somebody latches onto A, B, C, D, E, F, X, W, Z, something within the horizon of human experience, the proletariat, the Arian race, progress, science, money, power, sex, family, what ever it may be and makes that the ultimate reason for living. And MG says that that reason we call it idol. And the way we know that it is idol is that we sacrifice ourselves, our time, our energy and others to this thing, our relationship with others and we would kill others for this thing as well. And so MG says, the true cultural battle in human history, we said last week, is not between a conception of man who rests upon God and the one who does not, the true drama is whether one recognizes this God as a mystery beyond the human being or if he describes, uses, manipulates, he is master of this god. This is the true problem. Finally we ended with MG’s observation about freedom and the fact that if there’s nothing beyond this horizon, we as human beings, have been programmed by our biological antecedents, by our father and our mother, we have been given our DNA, we have been given our biological programming and we have also been given all the circumstances, because we did not decide to be born in a certain year, 1988, 1970, whatever it is. So we found certain circumstances, we were born into a culture, a context, we don’t even speak a language that we invented, we speak our thoughts, the most intimate thoughts that we may have, we express with a language given to us. So then finally, if there is nothing beyond the horizon of the physical world, if there is nothing more than a biochemical process, there is no freedom, freedom is illusory and the word freedom does not mean anything other than an illusion of doing something that I want, and doing what I want means doing what I was programmed to do in front of the circumstances as they appear before me. So MG says man’s freedom is within the relationship with something that goes utterly beyond every form of power, if you cut this umbilical cord with the infinite, you become the slave of whomever is more powerful than you. And he says the more we become civilized, the more those who hold power possess instruments that make it possible to arrest, even psychologically, from the very origins of thought and feeling, to arrest people with propaganda or publicity. So that was a brief review of our previous 2 sessions.

Now MG goes on to talk about religious development and he says, from the above observation we can better understand the development of religions. He uses a graph (Fig 2).

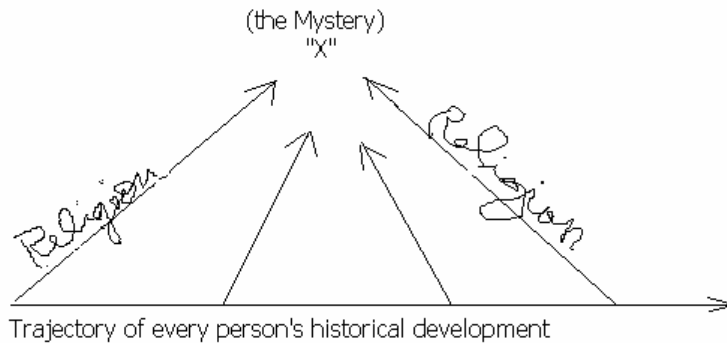


Fig. 2

He says, let's imagine that this line is the trajectory of all of human history and the trajectory of every human person's historical development. And he says, imagine that here above is that mystery that beyond that man intuitively he must reach. And then he says, if we think of human history as represented by this line here, it's as though for all of history, human beings have been seeking so much to establish relationship with this mysterious beyond. He says, in every moment of history, man sought to understand in what this relationship consists, between his ephemeral point and the final sense of all things. What links me with that mystery? What is the relationship I should live with this beyond? MG goes on: I propose that this dynamism is the very nature of reason, what makes what I'm doing right now worthwhile. These types of brutal and banal questions make up what here I would like to delineate and what the most evolved philosophizing developed and brought forth. This conception normally implies three reflections, if we think of these as either individual or collective attempts to somehow reach this mystery, to understand what the relationship with this mystery should be. This is how MG sees human history. And he says that usually, there are three fundamental characteristics of these kinds of attempts.

First, he says, there is the conception we have of the Mystery, what that X is, the serpent god of the Aztecs. The unnamed, the unnamable one of the great spirit of the native American Indians. This is one of the fundamental elements in this attempt to establish relationship with the Mystery to try to realize, conceptually, something about this mystery.

Second, he says, that is the great question about my personal responsibility in making this connection in living this connection between now, my life, these circumstances and this Mystery. He says, "What do I have to do in order to place what I'm doing now in relationship with that which makes it worthwhile?" MG says this is the ethical or moral expression of religions. If you think about Hinduism, the grave emphasis on necessity of duty, the way I relate with the Mystery is by fulfilling my social duty: this is the link

between me and that Mystery. If I'm faithful to my duty, my relationship with the Mystery is lived correctly and I'm moved toward that Mystery, over the course of many lives, for someone like Buddha meditation and the crushing of desire, in other words, the behavioral consequences I must live in order to be in relationship with this Mystery. Finally, there is an exterior or social expression, to this relationship with the Mystery, MG claims, we can call the ritualistic or the aesthetic expression, the rituals that we together engage in, the works of art, the ordering of our life in society, according to this relationship. MG says, fundamentally, it is these 3 factors that make up every religion. MG continues, hence, the religious sense, as the need to affirm a final meaning, expresses itself by creating a religion and everyone has a religion, just as everyone has a religious sense. Look, for many it's the family, or a woman or man, or money, or politics, or power, or it can be someone to whom you say, 'You,' knowing the One whom you address because you say, 'Our Father.'

MG goes on to talk about a social function, that he identifies in the human society, which he calls with the name genius, and when we apply that term to religious experience, we use the term prophet. He says, theoretically, everyone should have his or her own religion because everyone has his own temperament, different from everyone else, but there is a phenomenon in nature, that we call genius or prophet, the genius has an eminent social function because he holds, he expresses those needs that everyone feels in a given field, such that the genius expresses these needs better than everyone else. And he gave an example: imagine that my friend and I are a little bit sad one evening. I am a little bit sad, he is a little bit sad. He calls me up; he shows up in my house. We sit down with a bottle of red wine; start to pour a couple of glasses; we drink the glasses; mutter to each other and just be sad together. Let's imagine that my friend says to me "You know what we should do? We should put on Chopin." And so he goes and he puts on a piece of Chopin and we take a glass of wine and sit and listen to Chopin. There is a 3<sup>rd</sup> friend also going through a particularly sad moment in life and this friend decides to go and surprise me and my friend. Imagine this friend of mine, walking to my house, humming to himself a little tune which expresses his sadness, "Hum, hum, hum". Imagine him as he comes to my door, knocks at the door, comes into the house and hears Chopin – one of his nocturnes – imagine how he would stop in his tracks, stop humming, come and sit down with us and immediately be conquered by the way that Chopin expresses sadness, because this is genius. MG says, the Chopin piece begins and our friend stops whistling, because Chopin expresses what he was trying to express better. MG says, in this way nature has created a social function for all levels of society and for all functions that we engage in as human beings that we call genius or if we apply this to religions we call prophet. I remember that, from my own history, how true it is what MG says here, because in particular when I was in high school, I remember trying to learn the guitar and try to learn certain pieces exactly because they expressed something that I felt inside of me and that could be better expressed with the words and the music of somebody else that I could even express myself. He goes on and he says, if we apply this term to the religious experience we call the person a prophet. Which religion then would be the right religion? He says all of them are right in as much as they all express a temperament, a cultural environment and the era from which they sprang. He goes on and says that during enlightenment there was a very popular idea which sprang from the enlightenment thinking, which was that we should take the truest thing from all religions and put them together and make a one world religion, sometimes called syncretism or eclecticism and he says that the idea was that religion would progressively evolve, taking the best of

everything. MG says that this idea is fundamentally incorrect since, first, it raises the question: what criteria do we use to decide what is the best part of a religion? And, in the second place, think about what intellectual invention we would have to live. He says, if a person, in order to reach his destiny, must be a disciple of intellectuals, this is beyond doubts the clearest sign that one position is wrong. And then MG says that there is another possibility, and the possibility is that we opt for, saying that everybody does what he wants, not in a relativistic way, the way which we are up to understand, but rather that everyone sincerely makes the effort of trying to feel alone in dark after this mystery. MG says, since all religions are a native value that is equal, they are all true. They are all right. The most intelligent solution or suggestion, will be follow the religion of your environment, that presumably is the one that both corresponds best to your temperament, to your ancestors' history, to your history, to your culture character.

Then MG says, at this point we have to look at another representation (Fig 3).

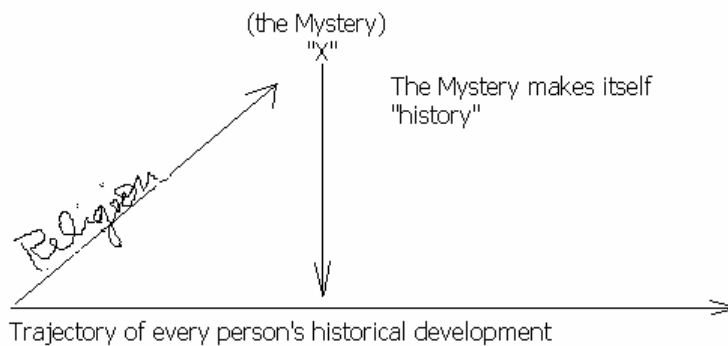


Fig. 3

Now see how each one of these lines is a religion, and MG says, what if, at certain point, this Mystery were to make itself an historical fact like any other? What if the Mystery were to make itself history, part of history, something effected by and something capable of affecting history? Let us suppose, at this point, within the dynamic of feeling ourselves along in the dark, that the Mystery that makes all things, this unknown were to enter into the historical trajectory as a human being like any of us, saying, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." MG says two things: first of all, we have to say that this is possible. MG says if reason recognizes that it's limited, if human beings understand the graph that we have done before with the circle, and there is something beyond what I can grasp, something beyond what I can understand, something beyond what I can conquer with my reason, that all of reality is a sign of the Mystery beyond myself, the first thing I must say is if this is beyond me, I can not say what it can or cannot do, I cannot say that it's impossible that this happened, otherwise reason is just the measure of reality. And, this is not to be understood theoretically as the natural progression of our intellectual dynamic, because post-modern culture is the witness to the fact that modern culture, which is exaltation of reason, finally commits suicide for reason itself. Therefore reason has to admit its fundamental limit in front of reality, particularly in front of the final sense of all reality, the ultimate meaning of all reality. Then we as human beings cannot say that this cannot happen. It is possible, it is possible that the meaning of all things makes itself part

of history. Second, he says, it would be extremely convenient. He reminds us of that famous piece from Plato's *Phaedo*, where Socrates says, "Unless someone takes this passage on a more solid craft, that it is to say, with the help of a revealed word of God". This is Plato that puts these words in Socrates' mouth. The only way that we can speak about these things with more certainty will be if a god would reveal to us something more than we know now. And so MG says, it would be extremely convenient if this happens. Not only it is possible but it will be something that would answer a longing, a desire, a need, an urge in all of us, as human beings. He says that one of the most beautiful cries for this possibility, the possibility of what he calls revelation, the hypothesis, the possibility that the Mystery reveals something about itself, comes from a poem by Giacomo Leopardi, which is entitled "To His Lady"

*Dearest beauty, who inspire  
my love from afar, who hide your face,  
except when deep in sleep  
your image moves my heart,  
or in fields where the light  
of day and nature's smile are brighter:  
perhaps you blessed that innocent  
age that is called Golden,  
or fly as an airy spirit  
among men? Or does greedy fate  
hide you from us till some later time?*

*Now no hope is left me  
of ever gazing at you:  
unless it may be, when naked and alone,  
my spirit travels those new paths  
to a foreign place. Once, in the fresh  
dawn of my dark uncertain day,  
I thought you were a traveler  
in this arid land. But nothing on this earth  
resembles you: and if there were an equal  
to your face, gestures, spirit, that beauty  
though similar would still be less.*

*Among all this suffering  
that fate creates for human beings,  
if anyone on earth loved you  
as my imagination forms you,  
he'd be blessed in this life:  
and I see clearly how your love  
might make me seek out praise and virtue,  
as in my first youth. Now heaven  
grants no solace for our troubles:  
and, with you, mortal life would be  
like that which heaven reveals.*

*Through the valleys, where the song*

*of the weary farmer echoes,  
and I sit and mourn  
youthful error that deserts me:  
and in the hills where I recall, weeping,  
lost desires, and the lost hope  
of my days: thinking of you  
my feelings wake. And if I might  
hold your noble image, in this dark age  
and sinful atmosphere, and be content  
with that vision rather than the truth.*

*If you are one of those  
eternal Ideas, that the eternal mind  
scorns to clothe in solid form,  
to endure the pain of our deathly life  
among fallen bodies,  
or if you are received in another earth,  
in the highest circling, among  
the innumerable worlds, and a star  
closer and brighter than the sun  
illuminates you, who breathe a purer air:  
accept your unknown lover, in this hymn  
from this world of unhappy and brief days.*

So we see in this poem by Leopardi, the desire not for a particular woman's beauty, not for a particular lover's embrace, but for beauty with a capital B, love with the capital L, that he might see it, that he may need it, that he may know it, and he imagines that is perhaps on a planet whirling around another star, far in the universe or that it is in the mind of God himself, but in any case, it is far, far from him. And MG says that he reads this poem as a prophesy of Christ's coming but that happens 1800 after Christ's birth. He says the response to this longing for beauty with the capital B, to meet a love with the capital L, to encounter it, the answer to this desire is the 1<sup>st</sup> page of John's Gospel: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

And so MG make two final observations: first, he says, if this were to happen, if the Mystery were to make Himself a fact in history, we must recognize that the entire method, the entire religious dynamic will be turned upside down. Because in as much as religion is man's effort, it is our human energy seeking this mystery, seeking to penetrate the darkness, fearing its way alone, inasmuch as it is our effort religion ultimately belongs to the intelligent, the creative and the powerful. Because it's the intelligent who can imagine the way of the mystery; it's the creative who can fashion representation of it; it is the powerful who can use it and manipulate in society. Whereas, if the Mystery were to make itself a fact, like you are a fact in front of me, like I am a fact in front of you, like it is a fact the column in front of me, the method of religiosity going to be overturned because now it's going to favor the simple, the people whose eyes are wide open and who register: this is there, this has happened! Those who run into this fact, don't say anything other than this is what has happened, this is what I've met, this is what I have encountered, seen, heard. No longer is religion in the hands of the intelligent, of the creative and of the powerful; if this is the new method, religion fundamentally belongs to

the simple, the humble, those who are open, those who look at the world like children saying yes when they mean yes and no when they mean no. Finally MG finishes with an analogy. He says, imagine a vast plain and on this plain imagine thousands and millions of people furiously working to construct bridges. He lifts this image from a poem by Victor Hugo, "Bridges to the nearest star". Think about those religions we were talking about. Imagine a plain where millions of people are engaged in fervent activity seeking to create a bridge from where they are to the star in front of them, the biggest, the closest, the most beautiful according to the various personalities of the people on that plain. He says, imagine if someone would show up on the brow of hill above the plain and he would be able to scream out, "Stop, stop what you're doing. Listen to me." And he says imagine if all these people were to stop and look over and see this man and momentarily give attention to him. Imagine this man saying, "All your efforts are noble and great because it is great that you look for that star and it is great that you try to establish a relationship with it. It is great that you try to travel to it, be with it but it is tragic because the means that you have at your disposal to construct a pathway to that star are too frail, are too limited. You will never reach that star; it will be always beyond you. But listen to me now; that star has had pity on you, that mystery has looked favorably upon you and has traced out a path to you. I am that path. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life." Because imagine, what would people say? Those people who were there on that plain, seriously constructing, undoubtedly the first people to speak would be the bosses, "Guys, get back to work, don't listen to him, he is an idiot, he does not understand anything, obviously he is crazy, get back to work." Only the simplest, humblest, most open workers who maybe were struck by something he said or the way he said it, might put down their tools, look at each other and say, "Maybe we should check him out." MG says, this is what happened in history, this is exactly what happened in history. One man did arrive, did say that this Mystery had taken pity on you in your noble and tragic attempt and he traced up a path for you, one man did arrive and say, "I am the way, I am the truth and I am the life." And those who had power and those who were in charge of constructing ignored his arrival, only the simplest, only those most open to be fascinated by one who arrives and makes this kind of announcement, only those put everything down and followed him. He says Christianity is born from this image, from this hypothesis that we just made.

## **QUESTIONS**

**Question:** This is the scene of a man coming claiming the truth, so if this happened in history then is it just historical or something that someone can verify whether this is true. How can verify if this true today?

**Chris:** You are jumping way ahead. I will give the answer, but I do want to emphasize that MG wants us to face squarely the fact that this happened, this happened. And that the people who were around that man when people started to follow him, killed him, because they have understood how convincing he was when he made this claim. The first thing is to admit, and, in next week lesson, MG opens with this consideration, he talks about the fact that, the more one possesses a religious genius, the more one has an authentic religious awareness, the more he understands his nothingness in front of everything, in front of being, in front of the universe, and therefore, the more he highlights his nothingness in front of mystery of God. He gave examples like Mohammed, the religious

genius that perhaps best embodies this sense of utter nothingness in front of the grandeur and majesty and imposing power of the mystery of God. MG makes a big deal of the fact that Jesus was obviously a religious genius and yet, far from emphasizing his limit in front of the mystery, his incapacity, his nothingness in front of mystery, he kept identifying himself more and more with that mystery. And so, the first thing is to say that this is something odd, has never happened before and has never happened since. Relevant people who claimed to be divine, the Pharaoh, historically we can talk about particularly kings that claimed particular divinity, but that claim to divinity is always a claim to a part of divinity, that is, if you think of Pharaoh or the Ancient Emperor, they are sons of the son god, the most important gods and yet there are a part of god. Jesus of Nazareth enters the only strictly monotheistic religious society, Judaism, the only society at that time on earth, which has a strictly monotheistic understanding of god, that is, there is one god and all the other gods are nothing, they are faked, they are a lie, they are idols, they are nothing and he identifies himself not with one of the many gods, but he identifies himself with that one God. So the first thing to be recognized is that historically this is an anomaly in the history of religion, the claim that Jesus of Nazareth makes, with all of that he says and all that he does, evermore, as his career goes on, as is in the gospel, is a claim which is anomalous in the history of religion, had never happened before, had never happened since. Perhaps there are crazy people today, even here around in the Greenwich village, saying they are Jesus Christ, but there are not many people around that claimed to be what he is actually is. The second thing is your question - how can I verify this fact today? - is something that is going to come in a later lecture, next week and the week after, so I am just hold off your question, I encourage you to come back.

**Question:** As far as revelation you start with Christianity but Judaism isn't also considered revealed religion? If it is, why do we not start with Judaism?

**Chris:** We don't start with Judaism because, again I want to be faithful to MG, and what MG writes and so I propose an answer, which I think is consonant with his thought. I think what MG would answer is that certain aspects of this mystery were revealed to and through the history of Jewish people. Therefore, yes, there was a revelation and there is a revelation within their covenant, in the promise made to them. But the identity between the Mystery and a single human personality is what distinguishes Christianity and so is utterly and totally novel. In other words, as the Mystery had revealed through the history of the Jewish religion, we accept that, we are grateful for it. And MG teaches us, first and foremost in the movement of Communion and Liberation, that we are Jews: this is how much he esteems and respects what was given in that covenant. But the identification of that Mystery in one single human personality, one specific, unique, unrepeatable human personality, this, I think, is a novelty which is represented in that graph. Just to go on a little bit with that thought, if you remember that God reveals something about himself above all in the history of the Jewish people, and the claim throughout the old testament so much is that when foreigners see you, my people, the Jewish people: "they are going to see my glory, they are going to meet my glory" they are going to see something utterly un-understandable, from this point of view God identifies himself with a people in the old testament, but what the Mystery is, that identifies himself with that people, comes clear only in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and becomes encounterable as a human personality, not as a collective. For this reason that MG place us squarely in front of this dynamic. Moreover, from an other point of view, you can say also, that to say "I am the way, the truth and the life" to say that Jesus appears on the stage of history, he does not

appear in a flash, his appearance is traced on Abraham, his appearance begins with Abraham and finishes or completes itself in the incarnation. So even when we say that the Mystery has made himself part of history, in some senses, it starts making itself part of history and fulfills then that promise of making himself part of history in person of Jesus of Nazareth almost like a tree or a plant, because, that is the point, that God identifies himself with an organic reality and therefore is a reality which develops in time.

**Question:** What is the connection between Jewish history and the history of the incarnation?

**Chris:** I personally think that you must identify the Jewish people with this dynamic of the Mystery entering history, that again, I repeat, it reaches its fulfillment in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And, by the way, what MG is proposing here is what he considers to be the most important fact that has happened in history. In other words, our being together here is not so much in order to intellectually categorize every event in human history, so to speak. In the first 2 lectures we were placed in front of an urgent and dramatic human situation, which is our need for ultimate meaning. MG believes that, if you are serious with this need for ultimate meaning, the first thing we have to consider, the first thing is: are those people, who say that that meaning came in the history as a man as a man, crazy or not? That's the first question. Because, if the Mystery did come into history as one single human personality, I must be in relationship with that personality, everything in me must pick up that personality and attempt to understand what that personality is and who that person is and how I can be in relationship with that person. MG is putting things in the most startling dramatic fashion he can because he sees human existence as something fundamentally dramatic. He always educated us to listen to classical music, to read poetry like Leopardi, to go on hikes and be in front of the beauty of nature, to go and be in front of the glory of nature, always to elicit this sense of life as something fundamentally dramatic, as always to elicit the longing for what is beautiful and true and good, for what would make life worth living. So just as he puts on the plate this need that we have, which, as we said in the 1<sup>st</sup> lecture, is anesthetized, so well by our society, so too that he proposes right away, right after that, the most interesting possible answer to this problem, which is that that Mystery came and identified himself with one human being: Jesus of Nazareth. From a certain point of view, if I am a sincerely authentic, humble and decisive searcher, the first problem I have to deal with is the problem of Jesus of Nazareth. Is what those Christians say true or is it a bunch of lies? And note, everybody who holds power in our society understands this clearly, because the only attempt that is made is to continually reduce Christianity to a religion, to one of those many efforts, to a story, continually telling us that the Gospels are unreliable, continually forcing down our throats things like, literally invented garbage, like the "Da Vinci code". What is the goal of stuff like that? If not to render Christianity another myth. Christianity is not a myth, Christianity is a fact. It is a fact as much as right now I am in front of you because I claim in front of the world that He is dead and He is risen, He is God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten and not made, one in being with the Father. That through Him all things were made. And for us men and women and for our salvation, He came down from heaven, by power of Holy Spirit He was born of the Virgin Mary, was made Man. I am the one that says in front of you and the world and so now we are getting to the answer of his question. The problem of Jesus translates into: are Christians idiots or are they not? Are Christians mad, are Christians visionaries, are Christians fundamentalists or are Christians people who have reasons for

what they are saying? If you are an authentically religious person, this is the first question you should try to answer. And that's why in our society everyone tries to make the gospels into myths. If you have half a brain in your head, if you have any respect for reason, you cannot give any credence to them whatsoever. This is the reason why there is constantly this attempt made, and that why we start with the person of Jesus, because it is the most interesting thing, it is the most interesting claim in history, if I am authentically and sincerely religious, if really I am searching for this Mystery.

**Question:** You mentioned the point of anesthetizing, how this avoids the questions. It seems to me that is an absolutely non-serious approach to the questions, meaning that it is not even worthy of being approached. Go deeper into this concept of anesthetizing our reason.

**Chris:** The best way we can look at it is to look what happens in our society because we can understand better the dynamic. Look at young people; young people have these questions. I know a girl who committed suicide just 2 weeks ago; I know that friends at her school are now cutting themselves with razor blades; young people have this problem. And it is so powerful that you must deal with the claim of Christianity; you must make them feel that Christianity is nothing but a made-up invented myth, or it is an extremely strict moral code that nobody could ever follow or if they follow, in order to follow it, they have to mutilate themselves, interiorly, psychologically, in order to allow themselves to live the life that Christians live. And so you must portray Christianity as a moral code which is impossible and irrational to follow, or a myth. Because not only young people have this question, also intelligent people have this question, because intelligent people in front of reality have the problem of what is the meaning of things. I don't think you can be a cosmologist and look at the question of the Big Bang and not ask, "What is behind that?" – and in fact they have theories to explain the universe and everything. But to admit that it is possible that the Big Bang happened and its origins is mysterious, you must, for some people render Christianity something other than a fact, you must make people believe that this is a myth, is a moral code, is an institution that we can hate, that they have certain political positions that we can oppose or you help people live most of their lives not thinking about this problem. And this is nothing new, there was a Roman Emperor who said, "give them bread and circus", that is, feed them and give diversions. The Internet, i-pod, movies, and then, if you are not a young person, if you have to work, how much is it not true for us that work is becoming ever more the source of everything in life? It threatens every moment of our life, of our existence, so the anesthetization is very simply that I look in a different direction, I don't think about, I try not to feel. MG says, the more we become civilized, the more those who hold power possess instruments that make possible to arrest this thought, even psychologically, from the very origin of thought and feeling, these questions. If you look at high school curriculum, much of high school English curriculum is designed to do exactly this. I personally believe that the point of making kids read "The Catcher in the Rye" is to give them the sense that if they begin to walk down the road taking these questions seriously, they are going to end up in a mad house, which is where the main protagonist of that novel ends up. If you take seriously the real needs for life, you too will end up like this adolescent.

**Question:** I was struck by someone I met who said that School of Community was a bit threatening for her. We are told to test what we read by experience. I find by reading quite difficult to grasp.

**Chris:** I think what you said is absolutely true. There's a very beautiful book by a person who unfortunately has become rather a *persona non grata* in certain circles, by Tony Hendra; we had a meeting with him last night; he wrote a book called Fr. Joe. He is an Englishman who was involved in affair with a married woman at 14, was taken by the husband of this woman to meet a monk, a Benedictine monk, and met that man at 14 and then went to America, and became very famous, became a celebrity, was involved with several movies, was in drugs, sex and rock and roll, destroyed his first marriage, but he said that he never lost contact with this man Fr. Joe. It is a very beautiful story. What strikes me is that this man lives an experience of what MG says is Christianity. He met a human being who was exceptional and the only explanation for his exceptionality, in the end of it all, was the possibility that his man was somehow bound up with the mystery of God himself. What struck me about my conversation with him was that, this is his experience and yet he did not understand until he met somebody who told him, so you met Christ in Fr. Joe. And he said that this was the first time he ever thought about that. What MG encourages us to do is become aware of our experience as Christians, to become aware of it, from this point of view this is not an intellectual work. I think the best example is the example of the man born blind in the gospel. "What happened to you?" "I was blind and now I can see." "Why?" "I met a man, he put mud on my eyes, he told me to go and wash them in the pool, I washed them and I could see." "Who is this man?" "I don't know I have never seen him." "You think this man is a sinner?" "I don't think he is a sinner because how could he have healed my eyes?" "How do you know this, you were born in sin?" So all these guys have a bunch of ideas and how does this man born blind keeps responding? "I don't know, I met him, he put mud on my eyes, I can see." He was aware of very simply what happened to him. And this is what MG is talking about the difference in method, this is exactly what MG encourages us to live in our Christian faith, simply becoming aware of how things happen, how convictions grows about the person of Jesus of Nazareth. We are skipping ahead to the content of future lectures. Thanks for your observation.

**Question:** If we could close the loop and talk about what is that experience like.

**Chris:** This is really next week's theme: what is the experience that one has of this Mystery made present in history, what is this experience? Is this your question?

**Question:** what is it to be a religious person in NY in 2005? How is that expressed? The dramatic experience of Pope John Paul and Pope Benedict forced me to look that I'm part of this. Goes back to this man that jumped into the water when saw the friend on shore. It is palpable that I am part of, He is touching us now, but our day-to-day life, subways, TV, this interferes with that experience.

**Chris:** MG is never one to give the answer so to speak, he is always one to put you in position to find the answer in your experience and he challenges you from this point of view. So what I would say to you is this, if we think of ourselves as feeling around in the dark, let's imagine like Dante does, not to be in a dark room, but to be in a dark wood, where the floor has overgrown, covered over, is dark, it is very difficult to move, it is

very difficult to make my way anywhere, because the underbrush is thick, there are vines everywhere, every time I try to move forward I trip, every time I try to move I find myself blocked, there is this tree and that rock; I can't see to get out, and I go and I go and I go and find myself back in same place; I have gone in a circle. Let's think of this feeling around in the dark with this image, which is, by the way, I think a valid image. If you think of it in this way and the claim is that the Mystery has entered, well it means that the Mystery is going to be in middle of that dark wood and get me out of it. So, in the final analysis, all I want to say is, either this has happened, there is a path that I can walk through this dark wood or no. So, I throw it back to you and I challenge you to find in your experience how, also by listening to the next two lectures, how it is that the presence of this mystery responds even to the problem of being in the condition, in the society, in the place in which I am, which is, we can say I think objectively, a time which is very difficult and with many obstacles. That either this dynamic really is and corresponds to what I am or it means that this dynamic is not. There is no third option here. Either this world as it is now is weaker than the fact of that revelation or this world has won. And this is not a theoretical question; it is a question of experience because you must verify if this Presence is stronger, so that you can witness to it in this place.