



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

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**FOURTH LESSON: AT THE ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTIAN CLAIM**

**LECTURER: CHRISTOPHER BACICH**

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

**Chris Bacich:** If this is your first night, this is a summary of a series of lectures given by Monsignor Luigi Giussani, the founder of Communion and Liberation, back in 1978 at the University of Bologna. He really summarizes his thoughts as we find today translated out of what is really the core of his proposal of the faith, which are “The Religious Sense”, “At the origin of the Christian claim” and “Why the Church?” printed by McGill Queens University Press. In our first 2 lectures we talked about the RS, we talked about our need for a meaning, in particular for the need for total meaning, the final reason for existence, for our existence and for the existence of everything and our need to be able to affirm such a meaning. We looked at our 3<sup>rd</sup> lecture at a graph where MG proposes a trajectory of human development.

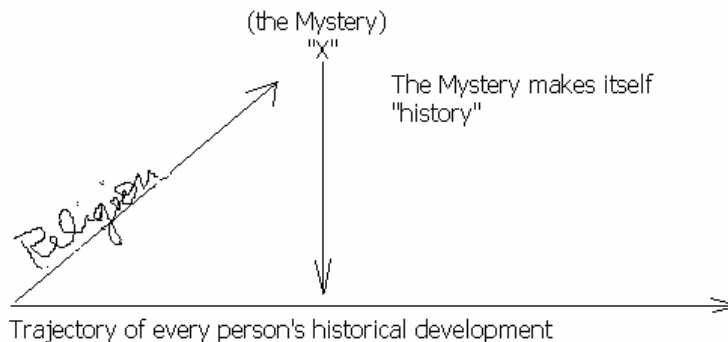


Fig. 1

And we saw how, and MG says here that every person attempts, has always attempted to establish an imaginative relationship that is conceptual and practical, and therefore ethical and has attempted to express this emotion or image by means of rituals. So everybody tries to imagine and practically realize the link that passes between the passing moment and the final sense of that moment, and therefore history. And we said that every person is seeking this mysterious something that would justify everything and attempt to make a connection to that. We said that MG calls this religion and we finished last week talking about the hypothesis of revelation, the possibility that this mystery takes initiative and

enters history and becomes a factor that could affect history and be affected by history. MG calls this the hypothesis of revelation. That what it is that we are looking for could come to our aid, so to speak, and become one of us. About religion, MG says, we saw that even if this affirmation, that is, that every person seeks to establish some kind of link between the passing moment, he or she finds himself in and an ultimate goal for living, even if everyone theoretically could establish his or her own link, *di facto* the process translates itself into a religion, in the socio-historical sense of the word. And we talked last week about the fact that there is this function within the human society that MG calls genius and when this function is applied to religiosity, we call, prophet, who expresses temperament, sensibility and need of a certain and given environment, so we end up with the great world religions even if theoretically each one of us could invent on his or her own this link with the Mystery, with this reason for living. Then MG says, and we saw this last week, that if instead this hypothesis were not just a hypothesis, if revelation were to happen, if this Mystery would make itself present into something that could be seen and heard, if it were to reveal itself in history, he says that the ancient or old human constructions, which are noble and respectable but necessarily incomplete and always disproportionate to goal, all of these attempts should be suspended, brought to a halt since the road would be marked off by God Himself. The human attempts were to be something to be remembered with admiration and emotion but they would have lost their value given that God had marked off the road. Hence for man it will become useless to follow his own road, indeed, not only useless, but unjust. So MG forcefully reminds us that all of these attempts to imagine, to reach, to give a form to a create a relationship with the Mystery, which will justify our existence as human beings, and justify the existence of the entire world, and justify the fact that there is death, and justify the fact that there is pain, and help us to understand the mystery of good and the mystery of evil. All of these things, which for an alive human being are a problem, a real problem, that if this Mystery were to enter history, that it would be time to put aside my attempt to create a relationship with this mystery and humbly follow the road marked off by God. MG reminds us and reminded us last week that eliminating this hypothesis was one of the major goals of modernism, was one of the major goals of the modern world, to eliminate this hypothesis, to say it is impossible. And he says this is a dogma born of a preconception, it represents the ultimate form of idolatry, the extreme attempt of human reason to dictate to God an image formed by itself. I, reason, prohibit You, oh God, from becoming one of us. And so with this quote MG reminds to each one of us a simple thing: that we as tiny and very limited beings as we saw where the clearest thing is that we need something beyond ourselves to be ourselves, to dictate to this Mystery what he can or cannot do, it is to transgress reason itself, it is to betray reason itself. Reason which indicates what reality is, the sign of something, demonstrates that reality is sign of something which is beyond it, the sign of something with which I must be in relationship. MG then after commenting on the irrationality of saying that this is impossible: that the Mystery can enter history in this fashion, also drew out a corollary, which is that this hypothesis, the idea of revelation, would turn religious dynamic on its head, we will be speaking of a presence become a content of an experience, the subject of an encounter, not a far off god, the subject of our imagination. In this case, that is the case that the Mystery would make itself part of history the intelligent, powerful or creative person will be on the same ground as a child. We are talking about a presence, so meeting someone

on the street is the same as a university professor as a little old lady. So MG reminds us that, if the Mystery were to enter history and become a factor that we could run into presence, so to speak, we could run into the presence of this Mystery, at that point, everyone is on the same ground. And just because you happen to be a brilliant scientist or an imaginative artist, does not any longer give you any foothold, does not give you any head start on anyone else, in all history, even the simplest person can recognize something so extraordinary.

MG in next step of his proposal to us says basically that this is no longer a hypothesis. There is a group of people, there is a fact present now in the world which claims this has happened. He says that we must be aware that the problem concerns a question of fact. And he goes ahead and says, given this up to this point, we've been using particular method, that is, up to this point we have been looking very carefully at our own experience as human beings and we have been reading our experience as human beings and, remember back to the 1<sup>st</sup> lecture, MG says that this is not just a set of ideas, this is a way of reading and understanding our own experience as human beings. And so he says, we have been using a particular method and this method is to be looking very carefully at ourselves and to understand demands that we are making in the impact with reality, the needs, the desires, the evidence that comes forth with our impact with reality. And so this method is justified because the object up to this point has been our own heart, our own reason and how it welcomes the demonstration of God by reality. "In order to decide whether this hypothesis of God entering the world is valid or not, shall we follow the same method? What method should we follow? It is a problem of fact: did it happen or not? So, we are now quickly moving from one method to another that is completely different. In front of this problem, we needn't reflect, we need to certify. It's a very practical, concrete problem, a problem of fact." When I speak with my students about this, some times I give this example: when I was younger, and actually, even today, next to finding the right woman and the most exhilarating experience of love, the next most important goal of my life was learning to fly. Because for me the idea to fly and not just "be able to fly" but to fly acrobatically, I wanted to be able to do flips and turns and spins as fast as possible, as close to the ground as possible, as close to mountains as possible, and fly through canyons, etc. The way I understand what MG is saying here is that, I remember when I was younger, we were six kids in a family, so the first thing that you learn when you want to fly and you are a kid is that it costs a lot of money, and so, if you are not able to pay a lot of money, you can't fly. I remember how I would go to the library and read books on building my own plane, I read as much as I could about the Wright brothers, the materials I would need, but they also cost money. I also remember getting on my bike and hanging out at the airport as much as I could; I did everything I could, I oftentimes rode my bike to planes and hung around the guys that just landed and they always give me a look like, "what do you want kid?" Imagine that into my life at 15, 17 years old when this desire was strong, imagine if one of my friends were to say to me, "Hey Chris, you are not going to believe it, but this guy just moved in next to me. He owns a plane and is looking for teenagers. He is looking to teach them how to fly planes for free because he feels like the world being ruined." Can you imagine my answer? "Are you giving me BS?" And my friend says that he really wants to teach kids how to fly because he feels that no one wants to fly anymore. So then my second response would be,

I'll show him right away that there are still people that want to learn how to fly. The problem changes completely, it's no longer a problem of inventing the airplane. Now it is a different problem; it is: is my friend telling the truth? There is a man living next to him who wants to teach teenagers how to fly. Now it is a completely different problem. Now all of my energies have to be spent in order to meet him. When, where, how can I meet him? How can I have this guy know that I am the guy who wants to fly more than anyone else in the universe? The entire method changes. This is a pale analogy with what MG says, but one which fits nevertheless with what MG saying. If my desire is authentically to somehow encounter this Mystery, to somehow relate to this Mystery, somehow understand what it is that answers the problem of my existence and the problem of everything. If this question burns inside of me, as the desire of flying burned inside of me, all of that energy would betray if, can you imagine the absurdity of me going home and say, I got all this bunch of books, I think I can construct my own, how my friend respond to me? "Are you nuts? Who cares about your books? There is a guy. He's next to me; he has a plane; he is looking for teenagers. It is nice that you are thinking are to build your own plane; it is very noble." But it is exactly in this sense that MG says that the person who is authentically interested in this problem, of meeting the meaning of existence cannot hear the news that there is, today, a group of people who claim that he came into history in order to reveal to us that sense. In the first lecture I gave you the example of baseball, I said, what would link hot dog, fresh cut grass, October? And one from the audience said: Baseball. Exactly. But what is it that links everything in history? Not just those things like in baseball, but everything? This Mystery. This thing that I be able to meet is the sense of all these things, myself and everything else. If the person authentically interested in getting to know that Mystery, this news arrives as the only possible real good news ever heard. So one stops in his tracks and decides that this is problem that has to be dealt with. Did it happen? Is it true or are these people a bunch of frauds? Is my friend lying to me? This is my problem and this is the problem of life. And in fact MG uses a quote from Dostoyevsky, which says something to this effect. In *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoyevsky writes, "Faith is reduced to this anguished problem: can an educated man, a contemporary European believe, really believe in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ?" And MG comments on this line saying by now the religious problem plays itself out at the level of this question. For the authentic religious person this is the question to grapple with. Did that man move close to my friend? Does he have a plane? Is he looking for teenagers to teach them how to fly? Is that man Jesus of Nazareth really divine? And so, MG takes as his starting point in order to begin to answer this question, the evidence that we have from the first people to claim that this happened, the evidence left to us in the Gospels.

MG stresses something which I, as somebody who have had the fortune of being linked to him in some way for nearly 20 years, it goes beyond just an idea, it goes to the heart of how MG faces the problem of the gospels and fundamentally MG argues that the Gospels are nothing other than a record from memory that was kept in order to make an announcement. In this book "At the Origin of Christian Claim" he makes a big deal; he says the Gospels are not a police blotter, they are not the transcripts of a videotape or of a recording; they certainly are not the result of investigations of some Roman official. And he also says that these are things that in some senses we would like, we would prefer. But

he says, in any case this is not the nature of the Gospels. The nature of the Gospel is to be much closer to a series of notes. Notes, he says, are lines that are pregnant with meaning, that is, a note has within it the content of the note itself and much that is left unsaid. If I am sitting listening to this lecture now and I am taking notes, one line here, one phrase there, is what I get down, but those phrases and those lines will remind me of other things that I did not write down. And we link together the entire scene of the lecture tonight, he says, the Gospels are exactly this. And from this point of view, in order to understand them therefore, we must attempt to fill in what is missing, what is understood by those who wrote down what they wrote down, and so the rest of this evening, from a certain point of view is going to be also an attempt to look at Gospels in the way that MG taught me and teaches us in the movement to look at and to read them. And you know that much is filled in with MG's imagination, much of what must have happened, given that this is the nature of the Gospels.

And so he starts with John Chapter 1. And he says, we have to imagine the situation, this is the Hebrew people, a people used to always have a prophet, a people who always had prophet to call them back to God, and in particular to judge them and to tell them that they have been breaking the covenant and this Hebrew people has not had a prophet for some hundreds of years now and somebody arrives on the scene that these people authentically believe to be a prophet in their midst announcing what many of them felt to be true at that time: that the Messiah should be coming any time. The great promise to David should be fulfilled at any time, this was on the lips of many people from humblest and poorest Jew to the Pharisees and Scribes themselves, they believed that was the time of the fulfillment of the promise, and finally a great prophet is risen, and, again this is John Chapter 1. And so people are going to see this prophet, and imagine these 2 people, two Galilean fishermen, John and Andrew. They are coming from miles and miles away, up from the north. They are coming down and we have to assume that if they were there it's because they want to see what this prophet is like. And so MG says we have to imagine these guys are there with their eyes wide open looking and listening for anything that they may hear or see. "John stood there and looking at Jesus, as Jesus walked by, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God', the two disciples heard him speak and they followed Jesus". And so MG says imagine those two guys with their eyes wide open. They were there to see a prophet, they were there with their eyes and ears open to see anything, to hear anything. And so this man says, "There goes the Lamb of God." And these guys, maybe because they were the ones that were the newest on the scene, they hear it and pick it up. Maybe the other people around were used to this kind of prophetic announcement, coming out from nowhere: "Well, he says things that we don't understand. That is why he is a prophet!" Maybe they just ignore it. But these two don't. "The two disciples heard him speak and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned around and seeing they were following Him, said, 'What are you looking for?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi,' which translated means teacher, 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where He was staying and remained with Him that day, it was about 4:00 in the afternoon." MG says when was it 4:00 in the afternoon? Was it 4:00 in the afternoon when John pointed Him out? Was it 4:00 in the afternoon when they went into His house? Was it 4:00 in the afternoon when they left Him that day? Because it says that they spent the day with Him. What was 4:00 in the afternoon

and he gives an example as one of those clues of what the Gospels are. If I'm constructing a narrative why should I place a line which makes no sense whatsoever? Somebody knew what he meant when he said 4:00 in the afternoon, somebody wrote it down, and since he said it, he wrote it down and we read it, but we don't know what he meant about the fact that was 4:00 in the afternoon. "One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him was Andrew, Peter's brother, he first found his brother Simon and said, 'We have found the Messiah,' which translated is the Christ." MG says, these 2 guys hear one day, "There goes the Lamb of God." They follow Him; they spend the afternoon with him. They come home and the first thing one of them does is to find his brother and say we have found the Messiah. MG says what kind of exceptionality, what kind of experience must that man have had in that one afternoon to come back to his brother and to look for his brother and to say to his brother: "We have found the Messiah"? What kind of experience must that man have had in that one afternoon to make them go to their family members, to their friends and say, "we have found the Messiah"? MG says, "There is an incredible spontaneity to this account. They remained there long enough to forget that it was the evening, the hour when their companions would be going out to fish. They stayed there and obtained that certainty, which they communicated to others. What happened in between is not explained. Yet they must have done something – they would have heard Him speak, asked Him questions, seen Him move about the house doing things, busying Himself with His tasks, watched His mother prepare a meal. We are only allowed to observe them the next morning, on the beach, as they wait for the return of the fishing boats and the others who went to work without them. The first thing one of the two men says to his brother, who is on the boat, is, we have found the Messiah. We can only imagine his reaction to this." MG says about these first few pages of the gospel of John, "Let us note where the signs of a truthful account and its nature as memory are to be found on this page. The account neither explains nor describes. Everything is assumed. It does not choose, in a structured way, what should be recorded in the annals of history." And so MG goes on to say the first ones who met Him, who spent the afternoon with Him, and the experience of staying with Him was so exceptional that they went to their friends and neighbors and told them that they met the Messiah, which, by the way is not a small thing. I haven't a lot of time to go into this but the image of that time of who the Messiah would be and what His task would be, the fever-pitch with which everybody was waiting for the Messiah and His arrival, all of these things speak about an incredible and exceptional experience in that afternoon, one we can only vaguely imagine. MG goes on to say that while just a few lines later in this Gospel of John we hear, "There was a wedding in Cana in Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and the disciples were invited to the wedding and, when they had run out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus said to her, 'What does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother told the servants, 'Whatever He says you do it.' There were there 6 water pots of stone, according to the manner of the purification of the Jews, containing 20 or 30 gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast.' And they took it and the master of the feast tasted the water that was transformed in wine and did not know where it had come from and he called the bridegroom and he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets up the good wine and when the guests have well drunk then the inferior, now you have kept the good wine until now.' This beginning of

signs Jesus did in Cana, Galilee and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him”. MG says “And His disciples believed in Him”: this line so clearly indicates a real physiological itinerary that we follow, as human beings when it comes to certainty. And he gives the example of a woman or a man that eventually you will marry, and he says imagine as the relationship develops; he says, perhaps it starts with an intuition that this is an interesting person, that there is something special about this person, and how in time this conviction grows, that yes, this is a person, so particular and so special, that I want to give my entire life to this person. And he says, even in the Gospel we find the traces of this itinerary of conviction. “And they believed in Him.” “His disciples believed in Him”. Why must they say: “And they believed in him”? They came back after an afternoon with him and told their brothers and friends that they have met the Messiah. “And they believed in him” shows that as they spent time with him their conviction grew, their conviction has to do with the fact that he was an incredible human being.

Then MG notes four imposing aspects of the personality of this man Jesus of Nazareth as it is witnessed in the gospels. He says, first, he had an intelligence that was out of this world and he gives a couple of examples about this. He says think about that time when the Pharisees and the Sadducees – and, by the way, it is difficult for us to understand the role that those men would have played, these men that challenged Jesus, for us is very difficult to try to place ourselves in the setting of a people, and then the rulers of this people are not just political figures, they definitively held the political power, but they were religious figures – so to see these men challenging, day after day, Jesus of Nazareth, must have been extremely disturbing, extremely difficult for disciples. And so MG gives the example of that day when, Jesus is teaching in the temple area and these are times in which the tensions are high between these Jewish leaders and himself. And so they come to him and you can imagine, perhaps, even tone of their voice, “Oh master we have a question for you.” You can imagine even the tone of His voice, “So what is it?” “Should we pay taxes to the emperor?” To imagine the cleverness of this question, if He says don’t pay taxes, He could be accused of sedition. If He says pay taxes, who is He? He’s a Roman sympathizer, the one who hangs around with tax collectors; He is probably a tax collector Himself. This is an exceptionally intelligent question. You can see that the men who pose this question to Jesus are not idiots, men who know how to reason, men able to construct a real difficult problem, the one that seems to have no way out and so I like to imagine the fishermen who are following him, staying with him, how they must have broken out in sweat, “What He is going to say?” They knew the two options, yes and no and they knew too the consequences, the consequences of the yes and of the no. Who knows what he is going to say? “Does anybody have a coin? Thank you. Who’s head is that?” “Caesar.” “So then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to God what is God’s.” Imagine how the jaws would have dropped among his followers. Imagine the grinding of the teeth of those men who had posed that question. Thank you master, thank you very much for the answer, brilliant! Or when they bring a woman, ready to be stoned because they caught her in the very act of adultery in the morning it says. You can imagine this poor woman, first and foremost taken from bed, in the very act of adultery, put in prison, imagine her thrown in front of this crowd. “Should we stone her master?” He bends down to write in the sand, it says. And I like to think that they must have thought that they had him at then. Because if he says yes then we can take him to the

Romans because he had somebody murdered and if he says no he's going completely against the tradition of Moses and the prophets, he is going completely against the law of our people. And so when He bends down to the sand to write, imagine how those men that have constructed not just an intellectual problem, but a real historical problem, we have a woman here who is going to die or is going to live and, if she is alive, I go home with him one way and if she's dead, I am going the other way. In any case he's under my power now. And so imagine when He bends down to the sand, imagine the joy with which one of them must have said, "Master what should we do?" With that grimace, as when a man thinks he's victorious over his enemy. He straightens up, "The one of you who has no sin you throw the first stone." And He bends down to write in the sand again. It says that the crowd went away: the oldest first. Imagine the sound as the stones drop out of the people's hands as they go away. Imagine those men who posed the question were the last to leave; imagine the amazement of his disciples, the utter, complete, flabbergasting amazement of his disciples in front of the intelligence of the Master that intelligence that always found its way out in problems which had no way out.

MG says that the second thing about this man that comes clear through the Gospel is how good he was. He talks about the story of this widow that He meets. At a certain point in his career he is so famous that he has to skirt the towns; he cannot go into a town openly and as he's skirting the town meets a woman behind a casket and the train of people wailing and moaning and screaming and crying. And so he goes up, what's going on? This woman in front here, she is a widow and she lost her only son. He stops everything and goes up to widow, the first thing he says is, "Woman don't weep." Imagine that woman, what would she have said? Hearing those words, seeing that face filled with tenderness, woman, don't weep, and yet with her son dead in a casket, in front of her and her husband just buried. Then he raises him from dead and he gave him back to the mother. But even before raising him from the death, just to make clear he's not doing it to show what an incredible magician he is, he looks in her eyes and says, woman do not weep, he's doing it for her.

MG says there's so many stories with children around him, let the children come and be here, so many accounts of how good he was, and MG says that it is very strange for a very powerful person to be also good because this was the 3<sup>rd</sup> capacity or characteristic of this man that we see in the Gospels: that he possessed incredible powers. He heals lepers, the blind man from birth, he made deaf hear, oftentimes cured people from great distances. MG says that it's as if nature obeys him, as if He was His Master, He is not there making incantation or making potions. He's saying, "Go home, your son is cured." And the man turns around and he makes his way home and meets messengers that tell him that his son has been cured. "And at what time was he cured?" Exactly at the time when He said, go home, your son is cured. And MG says, imagine please, what an incredible spectacle of a reality of this type would have been, from morning to night, for those who followed him, not for those looking for a miracle, who saw it and went away without thinking anymore of him, but for those who followed him to understand who he was. Imagine, day and night, seeing things like that, hearing things like that, and, more than anything, being in presence of that kind of protagonist.

Then MG says, the 4<sup>th</sup> characteristic that we see in Him, the greatest miracle was how He looked at people because there was nothing that could insulate you, nothing that could insulate you from that look. And MG says imagine Matthew, the tax collector, how must have Jesus looked at him? “Follow me.” For that, that man left his money and followed Him. “Zaccheus, come down from that tree, I am coming to your house tonight.” How must He have looked at Zaccheus, for Zaccheus to open his house with such an enthusiasm? Think of that woman caught in adultery; He stands up; imagine her, God knows how, utterly and completely destroyed. She’s in an adulterous relationship, she’s caught by the leaders of her people in a very act of adultery, she is put in prison, she’s brought out and told in front of a bunch of her people, by the leaders of her people, that she’s been caught in act of adultery. She is thinking that she is going to be stoned to death. Imagine, when He stands up and looks at her, “Woman nobody condemned you?” I imagine her not even able to look at him, looking down at the ground, “No sir.” “Then I don’t condemn you either.” Can you imagine when she heard those words, “I don’t condemn you either”, those words must have surprised her, and how she must have raised her head and looked at His face, what kind of look must He have had, as He said that to her? “Go and avoid this kind of thing.” The way He valued, embraced and grabbed the heart of the person in front of Him. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> incredible mark of this personality we meet in the Gospel. MG gives the example of when Jesus calms the wind and the sea. When I talk of this example I always remind my students: look, we both are in a plane and all of us have been in a plane when there is some turbulence, when things get really shaking. My brother was once on a plane when oxygen masks came down, it was a really terrible turbulence over the rocky mountains and he had some woman grab his hand and cry, “Eeehhh! Are we gonna die?” And my brother says, “I don’t know!” I like to tell the story, because this is one thing but it’s another thing if the oxygen masks come down and we hear, “Ladies and gentleman, this is the captain speaking, we are having engine trouble and preparing to make an emergency landing. There is a big difference between the pilot talking and the lady close to you screaming. I like to say this because in the story of the Gospel of the calming of the wind and the sea: these are fishermen who come to Jesus and wake him up – because he was always exhausted by talking, touching, healing, meeting people – “Master don’t you care that we’re going to drown tonight?” I like to imagine this kind of irony in their voice: “Hello, do you care that we are going to die tonight?” These guys probably are thinking: “here’s a bucket, Master.” I imagine Him waking up and coming up on the deck of the boat with a rainstorm really bad. You know why? Because the rain is not coming down, it’s going sideways; there’s chaos on the boat, and, “Be silent.” The wind dies down and the sea was calm, and it says in the Gospel that the disciples looked at each other terrified, and said who is this man that even the wind and the sea obey him? And MG says, in front of such an exceptional personality, in front of these kinds of events, day in and day out, this is the question on the people’s lips of those who followed Him. Who is this Man? Who are you? Even the Pharisees went to Him one day and asked Him, “How long you will keep us holding our breath? Tell us, who are you?” And Jesus responds, “I did tell you and you didn’t believe me.”

So the question arises, who are you? Who is this man? And Jesus answers. MG says, when the answer comes, the reason that certain people believe Him is because they have

spent time with Him, they have spent a lot of time with Him. He gives this example, imagine a small town, way, way up in the mountains, there is this tiny village with maybe 50 people, who live there. One day there arrives this very well educated man and woman. And they arrive there, they buy an old house and they start fixing it up, and as the people of the village get to know woman they noticed that the woman is very educated. In fact they found out, at a certain point that she is a doctor, and the man, when he comes to the tavern at night, to the bar, to drink and to play card, he is always telling stories about this place and the other place, how he's been to China. And so the people in the town are always searching for answers as to who these two people maybe. One says, I think he was a great general, another, no I believe he has been an incredible gambler, and probably there are people who want to kill him, and so everyone has a theory. Then one day, they corner him in the bar and they say, listen, you have been with us here for a year and we have been polite to you, but now, that you are coming every night to the bar, who the heck are you? And the man says, "I'm king of Portugal in exile." MG says why is it that villagers are likely to believe to this man? Because what he says about himself makes perfect sense, it fills all the gaps; it explains exactly the experience they had with him, night after night, when they spent time with him. MG says, this is why that group of people that followed the fact of the man Jesus, came to the conviction they came to, they asked the question, who is this man? And when he gave the answer, it was better than any answer they could have given themselves. And MG says, what is the answer that he gives? Well, he goes through a long process.

MG points out that, at first he just insists that he must be followed, then he insists that, in order to be followed, you must give something up, then you have to be his follower in front of the entire world, to publicly follow him, then he starts to say things like, you have to do things for my sake. If you're persecuted for my sake, blessed are you. Then he begins to say things like, you have heard it said that a man who commits adultery, that a man who kills, but I say, if you look at a woman with lust, but I say, if you get angry with your neighbor, so he identifies himself with the law, and, in fact he places himself at the origin of the law, as though he could rewrite law, the law written by God. Then he starts to claim the power to forgive sins. "What is easier to do: to tell this man get up and walk or your sins are forgiven? So you might believe that the son of man has power to forgive sin, I say to you rise, get up and walk." "Who is this man that can forgive sin? Only God can forgive sins." Finally he even says, on last day, when judgment will come, it will be Him who will decide who is good and who is bad and that it will be He who separates the sheep from the goats. Everything that was good will be good because He says that it was good, and everything that was bad will be bad because He says that it was bad, only God distinguishes between good and evil. All this is there in the Gospels and all is testified too by those first few people who met Jesus of Nazareth. Then Jesus becomes most explicit, at a certain point he gets into an argument with a group of sympathizers who seems to be friendly, interested in what Jesus is saying. And he starts out by saying to these sympathizers, if you make my word your home you will be my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth shall make you free. These people are surprised by this statement. Jesus' words have wounded their religious and national pride, in spite of their political idea they think of themselves as free sons of Abraham who was never bound to foreign rule. They protest, "How could you make us

free?” “Truly, I say to you whoever commits sin is a slave and the slave does not continue to stay in the house forever.” “But the Son does, if the Son makes you free, you will be free.” The argument continues to become ever more heated. They say, “We are not slaves, we are children of Abraham.” “I know that you are descendant of Abraham, but you try to kill Me, if you were like your father Abraham you would do what he did, he rejoiced to see My day.” “You are not yet 50, how could Abraham have seen Your day?” “I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” And they picked up stones to throw at Him. “Before Abraham was, I am.” Finally at his trial He responds yes to the question, “Are you the Messiah, the King of the Jews, the Son of God?” And He responds, “Yes,” in a very particular way by quoting 2 messianic passages of the Old Testament, “And you will see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven.” So His most explicit declaration comes at this trial, when of course the high priest torn his garment and says, “What do we need more?” This man has blasphemed and has made himself God. And so, the witness we received from the people who claimed that this hypothesis has happened, is not an hypothesis, is not a possibility, it is a fact. What we see from their testimonies is, first and foremost, the experience of an exceptional human being, and the experience of such an exceptionality provokes a question: “Who are you?” “Who is this man?” And this question is answered over the course of time in a very specific context so that the answer that is given will be best understood. This is not a man who arrives in a polytheistic environment, doing miracles and claiming to be a god, in a polytheistic environment it will be easy to accept, “Who are you, Apollo? Aries? Who are you who come to visit us?” He arrives in a particular context, the only, truly monotheistic context on the face of the earth at this time, and in specific ways of acting and specific loads of speaking, claims for Himself everything that was identified in their specific divine principle, in that monotheistic culture. And the group of people who were closest to Him accept what He says of Himself, accepts that He is indeed this divine, coming to history. MG ends quickly this lecture by saying nothing is more superficial than to compare Christ with the founders of other religions. That is, as the Christians have Christ, so the Buddhists have Buddha, and Islam has Mohamed. MG writes, objectively this is the only case in history where a man does not declare himself as divine in a generic way, but substantially, identifies himself with God. From the point of view of the history of humanity’s religious sentiment, it must be noted that the more a man is a religious genius, the more he perceives and experiences his distance from God, the supremacy of God, the disproportion between God and human being. The religious experience is precisely the lived awareness of the smallest of man, of the incommensurability of the mystery. We are told that when Saint Francis was found in the Verna woods lying face down in the undergrowth, he was repeating, “Who are you? Who am I?” In this way he fixed the abyss of difference between man and God, the two poles, which create the fascination of religious sentiment. The deeper this sentiment, the more it is like lightning shooting forth – powerful, bright, and burning – and the more man feel the potential difference between these two poles. Man can certainly act, “pretending” to be God, but it is theoretically impossible to conceive of identifying himself with God. Structurally man cannot identify his evident incompleteness with the whole, except by betraying a flagrantly pathological condition.

In other words, MG ends with this note that had this man, Jesus of Nazareth, just been some pathologically crazy and insane person, He would have never had anyone follow Him. The point is that this Man, somehow, was so fascinating as to attract a following of people who slowly in time came to accept His claim in history. This is the testimony that comes to us from the first people who have met this fact. This is, so to speak, the first thing that my friend said to me about a man who came and was next door to him and was a pilot, this is the fact we run into if we want to be serious with the problem of our humanity and so everything changes and the problem becomes, is this testimony real? Is this testimony true? Did this happen? In our final lecture we will take the last step on this long trajectory which will bring us to the Church itself, and the experience of this fact as present even after 2,000 years after its initial beginning. Thank you very much.

### Questions

**Question:** Is it possible that many people even though they had the idea that Jesus could have been the Son of God, for all the miracles, etc, they deny it?

**Chris:** I think that this question arises from you because of our cultural context. For us religiosity comes after a long effort, work, asceticism, I am convinced, and, after many, many years of grinding and difficult work. I think MG would agree with me, or rather, I am trying to express what MG says and witnesses to us in his life. For that reason it is very difficult for us to conceive of, and this is what we were just reading about from the MG's book "At the origin of the Christian Claim". It is very difficult for us to conceive of the utter and total difference, the complete otherness of us and the mystery of God. For the authentically religious person, and the Jewish people at that time would have been exceptionally religious, and I can say that even is today for those most serious Jewish followers as it is also for the most serious of Islamic adherence, as it is for any one of the most serious traditions on earth. This claim is an utter absurdity or rather, unthinkable. I think for people of the time of Jesus who watched Him doing what He did and listening to what He said, the thought, contrary of what you pose, I think that thought would have never crossed their minds: that this was Yahweh present. It would have been utterly and totally inconceivable. How could He be the creator of everything, the God of our fathers, who appears in fire and smoke, the God who destroyed humanity with the flood; it would have been utterly inconceivable, absolutely unthinkable. Also because we take for granted the very human experience: they would have seen him leave to go to the bathroom, they would have seen him clean his teeth, they would have heard him snore at night, when they slept next to him. I think that to have identified the mystery of Yahweh – in fact, if there are Jews people in the audience, I am asking forgiveness, because even just to say that is to be disrespectful – to have identified the mystery of Yahweh it would have been unimaginable to them. MG spends a lot of time in his work to explain why is it that there were certain people who would have believed, who could have accept this. For the Jewish leaders it was unthinkable and the Jewish leaders understood very well where He was going, think about His answer for healing on the Sabbath. His answer for healing on the Sabbath was, I'm going to keep doing it, I can do these things because, was man done for the Sabbath or was the Sabbath made for man? I am the ultimate authority of what can be done or cannot be done on Sabbath, and He continues to heal on

the Sabbath. In other words, they understand that this guy is not going to submit to their authority on anything. For the forgiveness of sins, etc, I think that it would have been inconceivable to the average Jewish person and the thought, probably would have never crossed their minds and probably, even after His death, His resurrection from the dead and even well into the first century of the history of the Church they didn't quite know how to express this conviction they have come to, that He was indeed the fullness of God. I am not saying that the Apostles did not teach that He was the fullness of God, I am just saying that certainly they ran into trouble trying to express what they were trying to express, trying to explain what had happened. I could be wrong but this is way I think of things.

**Question:** You can say that Jesus is Lord, is through the spirit.

**Chris:** This is an important correction. MG says that people that are able to accept that Jesus is the Lord, that He is the presence of the Mystery, that these people were able to accept it because of a gift. And he says, the prime example is when He is with His Apostles and He says to His Apostles, "Who do people say that I am?" "Some say You are Elijah, some say You are John the Baptist." "Who do you say I am?" And Peter responds, "You are the Christ; You are the Son of living God." And Jesus replies to him, "Blessed are you Simon, because no human person has revealed this to you, but it has been revealed to you by My Father." And so MG also highlights in his work that the acceptance of Jesus as the Mystery made flesh ultimately is a gift but that gift is prepared by many factors. The book is much longer than my lecture, he spends a lot of time speaking about the qualities of those people who accepted this as a fact and he talks about their simplicity, about their loyalty, about their adherence in front of the fact of Jesus, the time spent, the sympathy that they had for him, the lack of preconception and ideology. He talks about all of these kinds of things as necessary and preparatory characteristics for the person who eventually will become the person of faith. And this is way MG hammers so hard on the fact that having a preconception, saying from the get-go, this is impossible, is the greatest act of hubris, finally that the human person can engage. I dictate to you, divine, what you may do or not do. You may not enter history and be present like this and this is why MG also believes that much of the problem of our culture today is the way which it inculcates preconceptions into people at large. Faith certainly is a gift in the end but it is a gift that has to be received and how it is received is very important to MG, because being in the position to receive it and understanding how it is given, he believes are very important things and this is very much present in all the reflections that MG has on the Jesus' closest followers in "At the Origin of Christian Claim".