

# THE RELIGIOUS SENSE, VERIFICATION OF THE FAITH

by Julián Carrón

Presentation of the book by Luigi Giussani  
*The Religious Sense*. Milan, January 26, 2011.

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**1. THE RELIGIOUS SENSE, VERIFICATION  
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“[When I] watch the stars that shine there in the sky, | Musing, I say within me: | ‘Wherefore those many lights, | that boundless atmosphere, And infinite calm sky? | And what the meaning of this vast solitude? | And what am I?’”<sup>1</sup> This poem by Giacomo Leopardi expresses splendidly the experience in which our religious sense reveals itself. The impact of the “I” with reality unleashes the human question. An inborn structure within us is inexorably set in motion by the impact with reality, and it mobilizes the whole dynamism of our person.

To the degree to which we live seriously, no one can avoid certain questions, whatever their ethnic or cultural background. “What is the ultimate meaning of existence? Why is there pain and death? Deep down, why is life worth living?” Or, from another point of view: “What does reality really consist of and what is it made for?” The religious sense—Fr. Giussani always taught us—is the nature of our “I” inasmuch as it expresses itself in these questions; “*it coincides with the radical engagement of the self with life, an involvement which exemplifies itself in these questions.*”<sup>2</sup>

But why should we read *The Religious Sense* again now, making it the object of our work together? I’ve heard this question many times since we made this decision. The idea came out of the experience of the last Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, in which I re-read two chapters of *The Religious Sense* “from within the faith,” as I had occasion to observe.

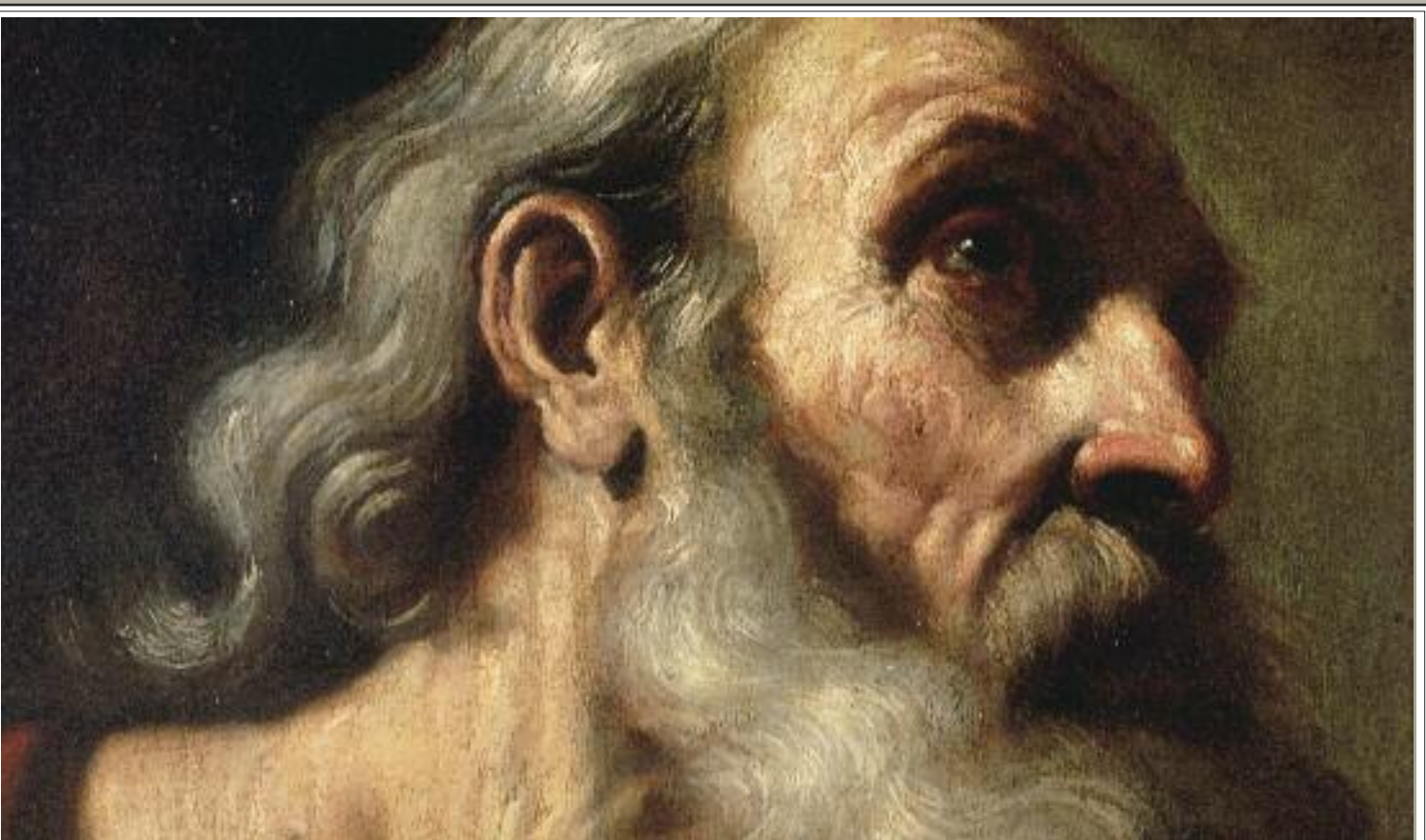
Everything was born of the observation of a fragility of faith as knowledge (that we called the “break between knowing and believing”), and not just in others, but in us, too, even though we have the grace of being immersed in a certain history. We, too, participate in the reduction of faith to feeling or ethics. Fr. Giussani observed that this happens not only where Christianity no longer is proposed according to its nature as event, but also because of a lack of the human in us. In fact, there’s a big “hitch” to Christianity: it must be acknowledged and lived by women and men. In last year’s Spiritual Exercises, I re-read some

chapters from *The Religious Sense* to try to show the nature and dynamic of that “humanity” that is missing in us, that is lacking, is blocked. Many were struck by how pertinent those chapters were to the journey we are making and asked that we re-read the entire book together from this perspective.

What does it mean to tackle *The Religious Sense* from within the faith? We’re accustomed to understanding “religious sense” as a simple premise to faith, and therefore it seems almost useless to us, once we have reached faith, as if it were a staircase for going up to the next floor: once we’ve gone up, we can do without the stairs. No! Not only is a constantly alive religious sense needed for Christianity to be acknowledged and experienced for what it is—as Fr. Giussani always reminded us, quoting Niebuhr: “Nothing is more unbelievable than the answer to a question that is not asked,”<sup>3</sup> or that we don’t ask any more—but, in the second place, it is precisely in the encounter with the Christian event that the religious sense is revealed in all its original importance, reaches a definitive clarity, is educated, and is saved. Christ came to educate us to the religious sense, as Fr. Giussani always told us (I’ll come back to this later). A lively religious sense therefore means a verification of faith.

Very meaningful in this sense is Fr. Giussani’s answer to a question posed by Angelo Scola during a noted interview: “The fulcrum of your pedagogical proposal,” said Scola, “is the religious sense of the person; is this so?” “The heart of our proposal,” Giussani responded, “is rather the announcement of an event that happened, that surprises people in the same way the angel’s announcement two thousand years ago in Bethlehem surprised the poor shepherds. An event that happens, before whatever consideration of religious or non-religious person. It is the perception of this event that resurrects or empowers the elementary sense of dependence and the complex of original ‘evidences’ that we call ‘the religious sense.’”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the Christian event resurrects or empowers the religious sense, that is, the sense of our original dependence and of our original “evidences.”





Guercino, *St. Peter* (1624), Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

If the work on Fr. Giussani's book *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* in these years has made it possible for us to see the human newness that is born of faith, enabling us to verify the pertinence of faith to the needs of life, what we are about to undertake with *The Religious Sense* will enable us to explore this pertinence more deeply. In fact, the pertinence of faith is documented in its capacity to reawaken the "I," to make it become itself, to maintain it in the right position for facing all of existence, its trials and problems.

Here, then, is the perspective from which we will read the text: re-reading *The Religious Sense*, and comparing its ideas with our experience, we can verify how much the experience we've had these years has influenced our lives, or, in other terms, "in what thing is Christ useful for the journey that people make in their relationship with things, walking toward their destiny. Otherwise, if He doesn't have this influence as real presence, Christ is a thing that has nothing to do with life, that wouldn't have anything to do with life. He would have something to do with a future life, but He wouldn't have anything to do with this life; which is the precise position of Protestantism."<sup>5</sup> In fact, if Christ is present, it isn't because of our words, but through His signs that we can acknowledge

Him. "He is, if He changes"<sup>6</sup>—this is the rule we have always heard. I can discover that Christ is present by the signs of human reawakening I see happen in me or in others. His presence is as objective as the signs that document it.

Engaging with *The Religious Sense*, then, we can verify whether the encounter with Christ has "resurrected or empowered" the sense of original dependence, the complex of original needs and "evidences" (of truth, justice, happiness, love) that Fr. Giussani calls "religious sense" and that are awakened in the impact of the "I" with reality. Now, if it is true that the emergence of these original needs and "evidences" is in a certain sense inevitable, it is equally true that the awareness of them is normally reduced, obfuscated, or silenced. This is what can be grasped in the weakness or absence, even among us, maybe after years of belonging to the Movement, of the sense of mystery in the perception of our "I," that is so tragically reduced—much more often than we realize—to the sum of historical and biological antecedents, to the product of circumstances. This is why a lively religious sense, without repression or censure, constitutes a sign and verification of the encounter with something beyond that is greater than me.

The same can be said of reason, which ex- >>

» experience reveals as “operative need to explain reality *in all of its factors* so that the human being is introduced to the truth about things.”<sup>77</sup> Challenged by the impact with reality to be truly itself (“unexhausted openness”) and to set itself into motion in the search for its exhaustive explanation, reason reaches its authentic apex intuiting the existence of a beyond from which everything flows and to which everything points. “The summit of reason’s conquest is the perception of an unknown unreachable presence, to which all human movement is destined, because it depends upon it. It is the idea of *mystery*.”<sup>78</sup> Those who do not block that dynamism will come to live with the awareness of the mystery. The more intensely they live reality, the more the dimension of the mystery will become familiar to them.

But, here too, we are almost irresistibly tempted to reduce, to use reason as measure, instead of having it like a window thrown open “before the unexhausted call of the real.”<sup>79</sup> The inevitable consequence is the reduction of the perception of reality, void of mystery. This is what can be observed in the “destitution of the visible,” in the way we normally flatten or empty circumstances and what happens: reality, which presents itself originally to our reason as sign, is reduced to its perceptively immediate aspect, deprived of its meaning, of its profundity. For this reason, we often suffocate in the circumstances—each of us can verify this in our own experience. When reality is reduced to appearance, it becomes a cage.

As then-Cardinal Ratzinger observed years ago, “By no means the least important practical function of faith is to offer healing for the reason as reason, not to overpower it or to remain outside it, but in fact to bring it to itself again.”<sup>10</sup> The exaltation of reason, freedom from its reductions, is again the verification of a real faith.

Now, why is the reawakening of the religious sense so decisive today? Why do we feel the urgent need for this? It is decisive because the religious sense is the ultimate criterion of every judgment, of a judgment that is true and authentically “mine.” If we don’t want to be

“cheated, alienated, enslaved by others, or exploited,”<sup>11</sup> we must become accustomed to comparing everything with that immanent and objective criterion that is the religious sense. After the Christian encounter, we continue to live in the world and are called like everyone to face the challenges of life. We must face them in this particular moment in history, dominated by confusion and the “drop in desire,” by a suffocating rationalism, on the one hand, and by spreading sentimentalism, on the other; by the reduction of reality to appearance and the heart to sentiment. If Christ is not incisive in our life, reawakening our humanity, broadening our reason, and not reducing reality, we find ourselves thinking the same way as everyone else, with the same mentality as everyone, because the criterion of judgment we originally possess, the “heart,” which is reason and affection together, is wrapped in this confusion. This means that we can continue to affirm the “truths” of the faith but not be protagonists in history, because there is no appreciable difference in us. As Benedict XVI said, “The contribution of Christians can be effective only if knowledge of faith becomes knowledge of reality.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition to rendering us useless for history (increasingly dominated by a “power” that aims to throw man into confusion, to reduce his desire, and to promote a reduced use of reason), this provokes the question of the reasonableness of the faith. Why is it reasonable to be Christians? Why is faith to our advantage, humanly speaking? The reason many abandon the faith is that they discover no trace of this advantage. Thus, the “power” can continually expand their influence, finding people increasingly disarmed. “It is as if ‘power,’ that is the dominant mentality, forced our educators, parents included, to alter the simplicity of our nature [“the original evidences,” we said before] ever since we were children. Therefore, we need to recover the simplicity of our nature. This School of Community on *The Religious Sense* is simply an invitation and prompt to recover the simplicity, the authenticity of our nature (there is a reason that the third premise defines the morality necessary for knowing as ‘poverty of spirit’).”<sup>13</sup>





We can be accomplices in the influence of “power” if we presumptuously think we can make it on our own, without an intelligent and affective *sequela* of the one point that the Mystery has given us to tear us away from nothingness. Even among us, the confusion can be so deep that when we try to indicate a solution to the situation we live in, we find ourselves repeating the same answers as everyone else: some think the solution is to come to an agreement (“stay together”), others think it is found in politics, in greater participation in the

distribution of power, or in a career, or in a new love adventure, and so on. After two thousand years of Christian history, after years of grace of the charism, we could find ourselves in the human situation before the arrival of Christ: an unbounded variety of ultimately impotent attempts, in which people emphasize their prejudices or the aspects most consonant to their nature.

“Who will deliver me from this mortal condition?” we will ask with St. Paul. What is necessary for us? What experience? Christ saves >>>

**Diego Velázquez, St. Thomas** (1619), Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans.



**Abraham Bloemaert,**  
*St. Matthew and  
the Angel, 1621.*

» us from this variety of ultimately impotent attempts. Let's try to return to the origin.

## **2. CHRIST CLARIFIES THE RELIGIOUS SENSE**

Inviting us to identify with the events in John's Gospel, Fr. Giussani describes magnificently how this fact happened.

"At last came this John, called the Baptist, living in such a way that all the people were struck by him and, from the Pharisees to the humblest peasant, they left their homes to go hear him speak, at least once. That day, we don't know whether there were many or a few, but two were there for the first time, and they were entirely eager, open-mouthed, in the attitude of people who had come from far away, and see what they had come to see with boundless curiosity, with a poverty of spirit, with a childish simplicity of heart. [...] At a certain point, a person left the group and went off along the

path leading up the river. When He moved off, the prophet John the Baptist, suddenly inspired, cried out, 'That is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.' The people didn't take much notice [...] but those two, open-mouthed, with eyes wide open like children, saw where the Baptist's eyes were looking: at that man who was walking away. So, instinctively, they set off after Him, followed Him, timid and a little embarrassed. He realized that someone was following Him. He turned around. 'What do you want?' 'Master,' they replied, 'where do You live?' 'Come and see,' He said kindly. They went 'and saw where He lived, and stayed the whole of that day with Him.' We can easily identify with those two sitting there, watching that man speak of things they had never heard, yet so close, so fitting, so resounding. [...] They did not understand; they were simply captivated, drawn, over-



whelmed by Him speaking. *They watched Him speak*. Because it is by ‘watching’ [...] that some people realized that amongst them there was something indescribable: a Presence not only unmistakable but incomprehensible, and yet so penetrating; penetrating because it corresponded to what their heart was waiting for, in a way beyond all compare. Their fathers and mothers had never told them with such evidence and efficacy what made the years of their life worth living. They hadn’t been able to, couldn’t have known how; they had said many other right and good things, but like fragments of something they had to try to grasp in the air to see if one matched with the other. A profound correspondence. [...] Little by little as the words came to them, and their eyes, full of wonder and admiration, penetrated that man; they felt themselves changing, felt that things were changing: the echo of things changed, the meaning of things changed.” The account doesn’t end here, because Giussani imagines John and Andrew as they went home after that meeting with Christ. “And when they went home that evening, as the day came to an end—probably walking most of the journey in silence, because they had never spoken to each other as they did in that great silence in which an Other was speaking, in which He went on speaking and echoing within them, and they reached home, Andrew’s wife saw him and said, ‘What’s happened to you Andrew?’, and the children, too, looked at their father astonished: he was himself, but ‘more’ himself; he was changed. It was himself, but he was different. And when—as we said once, moved, with an image that is easy to bring to mind because it’s so realistic—she asked him, ‘What’s happened?’, he embraced her, Andrew embraced his wife and kissed his children: it was him, but he had never embraced her like that! It was like the dawning of a new, different humanity, a truer humanity. It was as if he were saying, ‘At last!’ without believing his own eyes. But it was too clear for him not to believe his own eyes!”

This scene describes better than a thousand words how the religious sense was clarified because it had found its true object. Meeting Je-

sus, Andrew was himself, but “more himself;” he was different. For, “The object of the religious sense is ultimately the unfathomable mystery; so it is understandable that man should think of it in such a way as to have a thousand thoughts about it. But the truth is one. However, it is impossible for man to reach it, so the Mystery became a human fact, became a man, a man who moved with his legs, who ate with his mouth, who wept with his eyes, and who died. This is the true object of the religious sense. So, in discovering this fact of Christ, the religious sense is also revealed to me, clarified for me in a marvelous way.”<sup>14</sup> And thus it frees me from all my attempts.

This is nothing other than the application of a universal law, since the time human beings were human beings (“A person rediscovers himself in a living encounter”<sup>15</sup>); but here, in the encounter with the presence of the Mystery become a human fact, this law is fulfilled, becomes true definitively: “When I met Christ I discovered myself a man,”<sup>16</sup> said the Roman rhetorician, Marius Victorinus, as he publicly announced his conversion. But “it is in an encounter that I become aware of myself. [...] The ‘I’ awakens from its imprisonment in its original womb; it awakens from its tomb, from its sepulcher, from its closed situation of origin and—as it were—‘resurrects,’ becomes aware of itself, precisely in an encounter. The outcome of an encounter is the kindling of the sense of the person. It is as if the person were being born: he is not born in the encounter, but there he becomes aware of himself, so he is born as personality.”<sup>17</sup>

This encounter enables us to discover the mystery of our “I.” “He was himself, but even more himself;” he had never been so much himself. Thus, during a conversation, referring to the text of *The Religious Sense*, Fr. Giussani wondered, “Why were we the ones to write a book about the religious sense? [...] Because we encountered Jesus and, looking at Him and listening to Him, we have understood what was inside us: ‘Whoever knows You, knows himself,’ St. Augustine said. [...] Because in order to know the religious sense and develop >>

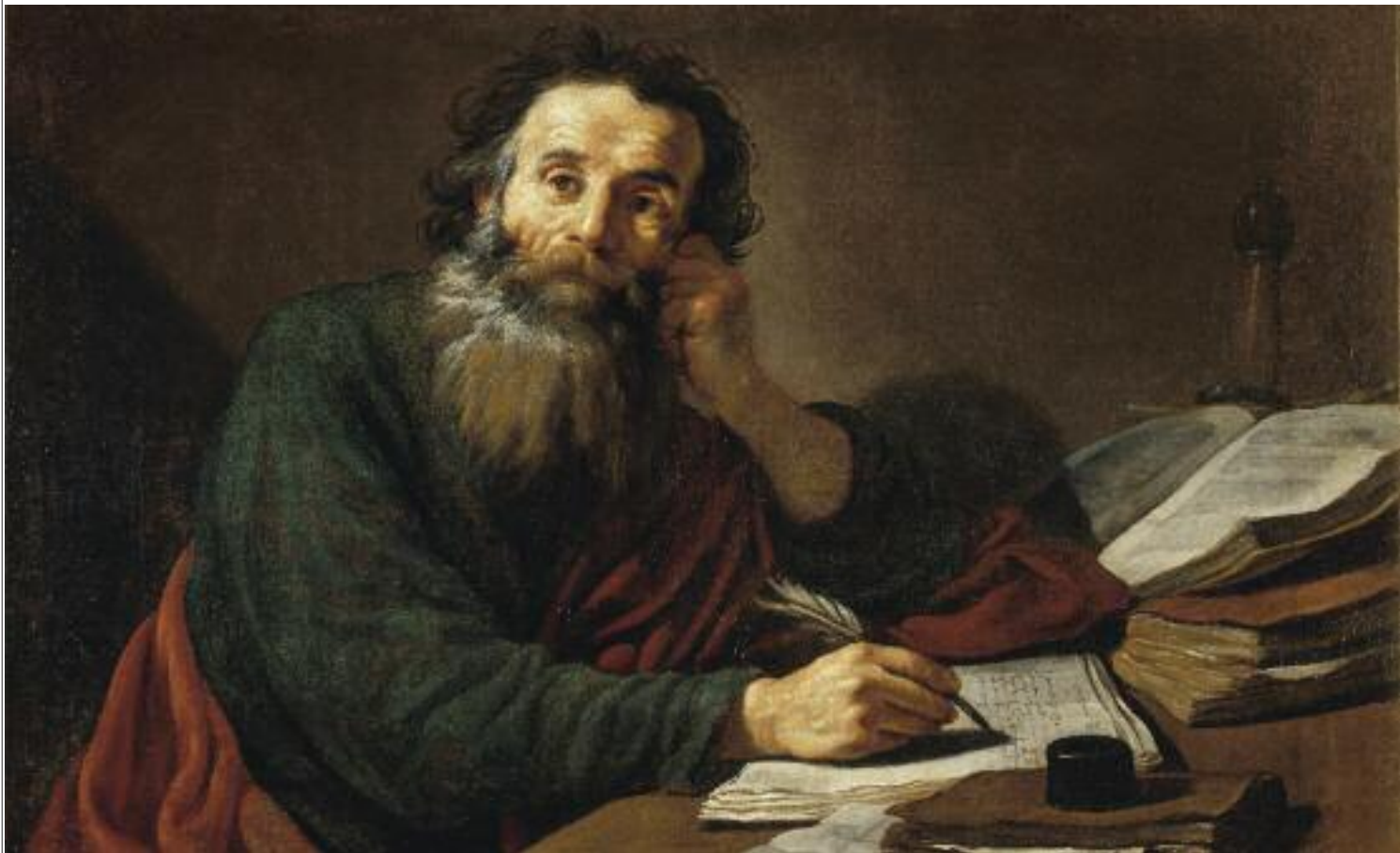
» the religious sense we had to encounter someone: without this 'master' we would not have understood. Thus I can say to Christ: 'You are really me.' I can say, 'You are me' to Him because, listening to Him, I have understood myself, whereas those who try to understand themselves by reflecting on themselves get lost in a thousand paths, a thousand ideas, a thousand images."<sup>18</sup>

### 3. CHRIST EDUCATES THE RELIGIOUS SENSE

Precisely because Christ reveals and clarifies man's religious sense, He can also educate it. Someone might think—even someone who has already encountered Christ or lives in a Christian context—that, since the religious sense is an original endowment, there is no need for it to be educated or that, once it has been awakened, it works on its own, spontaneously becoming the dimension of every instant. The following passage by Fr. Giussani helps us understand how abstract this is. "During a conversation I had with a leading university professor, he let

slip this remark: 'If I didn't have chemistry, I would kill myself.' Something like this is always at play in our interior dynamic, even if we are unaware of it. There is always something that makes our lives worth living in our own eyes, and while we would not reach the point of wishing to die, without it everything would be colorless and disappointing. Man offers all his devotion to that 'something' [the 'god'], whatever it may be. No one can avoid a final implication: whatever it may be, in the moment in which human conscience corresponds to it, living, what is being expressed is a religiosity; what is being attained is a level of religiosity. The characteristic proper to the religious sense is that of being the ultimate, inevitable dimension of every gesture, of every action, of every type of relationship. [...] The proof that the religious sense is not adequately educated can be found in this precise point: there exists a repugnance in us, a repugnance that has become instinctive, towards the idea that the religious sense might dominate, might consciously de-

Claude Vignon,  
*St. Paul*,  
Sec. XVII. Galleria  
Sabauda, Turin.





termine our every action. This is the symptom that the development of the religious sense in us is atrophied, partial: the extensive, tiresome difficulty, the sense of extraneousness we feel when we hear that God is all determining, the factor we cannot escape, the criterion by which we make choices, study, produce in our working lives, join a political party, carry out scientific research, look for a wife, or a husband, or govern a nation.”<sup>19</sup>

We can judge for ourselves the extent of this repugnance towards letting the whole of one’s life be determined by God. In this way, we will understand how much we need to let ourselves be educated to the religious sense. In fact, “Education of the religious sense, on the one hand, should foster the awareness of the fact that an inevitable and total dependence exists between man and what gives meaning to man’s life. On the other hand, it would help man, through time, to expunge that unrealistic sense of extraneousness he feels towards his original situation.”<sup>20</sup>

One understands, then, the reason for the Incarnation: “God’s aim in becoming man was to educate people to the religious sense, because the religious sense is the exact point of departure that people have for traveling towards all of reality, and the Mystery Himself who makes reality. Therefore, following Christ means being in the best condition for dealing with reality and walking toward destiny in the best of ways: it is called salvation, as we have called it here, not in the definitive sense of the word, but in the operative sense of the term. Those who follow Christ are in the best condition for dealing with reality and dealing with the problem of destiny.”<sup>21</sup>

How are we educated today to the religious sense? By participating in the life of that reality where Christ remains contemporary—the Church. “The Church’s function on the world scene is already implicit in its awareness that it is the protraction of Christ: this means that it has the same function as Jesus in history, which is to educate all men and women to the religious sense, precisely in order to be able to ‘save’ them. In this context, the religious sense

or religiosity means [...] man’s exact position towards his own destiny in terms of consciousness and his attempt to live it in practical terms.”<sup>22</sup>

This shows the need for the Mystery to continue being present in history. For if Christ does not remain contemporaneous, if He does not go on challenging man, man returns to being irremediably alone, and each of us knows how far we can fall if we are alone.

How can we free ourselves from this inexorable decay?

#### 4. CHRIST SAVES THE RELIGIOUS SENSE

None of us, by our own efforts, can keep ourselves in the right position, even though the encounter with Christ opened us up to it. The only response to our fragility is the real permanence of His presence.

The historical situation in which we find ourselves today in the West is, in this sense, a true challenge for Christianity as well, forced to show the truth of its claim that it answers the needs of the human being. Not just any version of Christianity will be capable of reawakening humanity (we know this well). Neither a Christianity reduced to ideas (“notional” in Newman’s term) nor a Christianity reduced to ethics will be able to bring people out of their torpor (in his address to the Roman Curia last December 20<sup>th</sup>, Benedict XVI spoke of the “sleep of a faith grown tired”), out of the ever more egregious flattening out of their desire, of their original impetus, of their gusto in living. It is in Christianity’s capacity to continually reawaken the human that its authenticity will be shown.

Only a Christianity that preserves its original nature, its unmistakable traits of contemporaneous historical presence—the contemporaneousness of Christ—can be equal to the real need of men and women, and is therefore able to save the religious sense. It is not a question of accepting a postulate but of discovering a human newness in action: the Christian announcement submits itself to this test, to the tribunal of human experience. When, in the life of people who accept belonging to Christ >>

» through the reality of the Church, concretely and persuasively emerging in their experience (charism), something happens that they could not achieve by their own powers—an unforeseeable reawakening and fulfillment of humanity in all its fundamental dimensions—then Christianity is shown to be credible and its claim is made verifiable. “For every tree is known by its own fruit”<sup>23</sup>—this is the formidable epistemological criterion that Jesus Himself offers us. The change generated by the relationship with Christ present is such that St. Paul cannot but exclaim, “So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”<sup>24</sup> The new creature is the person in whom the religious sense is realized in its—otherwise impossible—fullness: reason freedom, affection, and desire.

“Christ is so beautiful that He draws me totally!”<sup>25</sup> exclaimed Jacopone da Todi. This beauty, as splendor of the truth, is the only thing able to reawaken people’s desire and to move their affection so powerfully as to make continually possible the openness of their reason to the reality before them (“The condition for reason to be reason is that affectivity invests it and so moves the whole person”<sup>26</sup>). The attraction of Christ facilitates the openness that would be impossible without Him (it doesn’t achieve it automatically). Christ’s contemporaneity thus allows reason all its openness, enabling it to reach an intelligence of reality unknown before. All things, all circumstances, even the most banal, are exalted, become signs, “speak,” are interesting to live. The person awakened in this way and sustained by the presence of Christ can finally live as a religious person, can endure the vertigo of life, circumstance after circumstance, because she or he is able to “enter any situation whatsoever [in any circumstance], profoundly tranquil, with a promise [or capacity] of peace and joy,”<sup>27</sup> said Fr. Giussani. Thus, Christ’s contemporaneity is indispensable for living the religious sense fully, that is to say, for having the right attitude before reality.

If, on the contrary, Christ is not lived as contemporaneous, the consequences are not long

in coming. The lack of experience of Christ’s contemporaneity makes us return to the situation before the Christian encounter and, even if we keep talking of Christ (as often happens), we reduce Him *de facto* to one of the many variants of the religious sense: “To the modern person [this is a truly acute observation by Fr. Giussani, that makes us keenly aware of the situation in which we live], ‘faith’ would generically be nothing other than an aspect of ‘religiosity,’ a kind of feeling with which to live the restless search for one’s origin and destiny, which is precisely the most appealing element of every ‘religion.’ All modern consciousness is bent on uprooting the hypothesis of Christian faith from man, and on reducing faith to the dynamic of the religious sense and to the concept of religiosity. This confusion unfortunately also penetrates the mentality of the Christian people.”<sup>28</sup>

There is an essential and irreducible difference between the dynamics of faith and those of the religious sense. “While religiosity is born of the need for meaning awakened by the impact with reality, faith is the acknowledgment of an exceptional Presence that corresponds totally to our destiny, and adherence to this Presence. Faith is acknowledging as true what a historical Presence says of itself.”<sup>29</sup> This difference can be seen above all in the way reason moves. In Christian faith, there is no longer a reason that explains, but a reason that opens itself—perceiving itself at last fulfilled in its dynamics—to the self-revelation of God Himself. One understands, then, why Fr. Giussani said that “the whole problem of intelligence [not of feeling or mood] is there”<sup>30</sup> in the episode of John and Andrew. Faith is an act of reason moved by the exceptional nature of a Presence: “Christian faith is the memory of a historical fact: a Man said of Himself something that others accepted as true and that now I, too, accept because of the exceptional way in which that fact still reaches me. Jesus is a man who said, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’ He is a Fact that happened in history: a child, born of woman, registered in the Bethlehem birth registry, who, once He had grown up, announced He was God: ‘The Father and I are one.’ Paying atten-



**Eugène Burnand,**  
*Peter and John Running  
 to the Sepulchre* (1898),  
 Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

tion to what that Man did and said, so as to come to say, 'I believe in this Man,' adhering to His Presence and affirming what He said as the truth: this is faith."<sup>31</sup>

So, "just think what a challenge the claim of faith represents for the modern mentality: that a man should exist—to whom I can say "You"—who says, 'Without Me, you can do nothing,' that a man should exist who is Man-God. We can never measure ourselves completely against this claim; today, neither the people nor the greatest philosophers tackle this problem any longer, and if they do so at all, it is in order to consolidate the negative preconception inherited from the dominant mentality. In other words, the answer to the Christian problem 'Who is Jesus?' is deduced from pre-constituted conceptions about the human person and the world. Yet Jesus' answer is, 'Look at My works;' in other words, 'Look at Me,' which is the same. Instead, people don't look Him in the face; they eliminate Him before taking Him into consideration. Unbelief is therefore a corollary deriving from a preconception; it is an applied preconception, not the conclusion of a rational inquiry."<sup>32</sup>

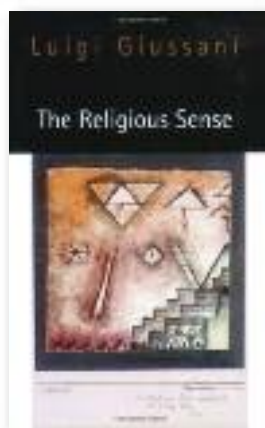
But what interests us above all now is to focus on the consequence of refusing the mode God chose to respond to the person's need for total meaning, a need inherent in the religious sense. "Without acknowledgment of the Mys-

tery present, night advances, confusion advances, and—as such—at the level of freedom—rebellion advances, or disappointment so fills up the measure that it is as if we no longer expected anything, apart from the furtive satisfaction or the furtive answer to a brief request."<sup>33</sup> Without acknowledgment of Christ's contemporaneity, the true humanity, the drive of the religious sense fails. Instead, those who acknowledge it see their humanity brought beyond their wildest imagination: "Saying that our consciousness, our way of thinking and our affection, our way of loving are converted to Christ means that this consciousness and affection are continually brought, transported where they would not have imagined, continually solicited to go out of themselves, they go beyond themselves, are continually brought into a terrain, a territory beyond anything conceived or felt before. It is always into the unknown that they are introduced; it is a measure that broadens: consciousness and affectivity are introduced continually into an unforeseen horizon, beyond their own measure,"<sup>34</sup> and life acquires breathing room, import, and intensity never before experienced.

With this, each of us has the criterion for verifying our journey of faith, our education to the religious sense—the exaltation of our original humanity. "Amen, I say to you, »»



» unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>35</sup> This could be the summary formula for a true education of the religious sense. And this is why Christ calls blessed those who have it: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>36</sup> These passages show us the true purpose of this education: to throw us so wide open that we can be filled with a thing we ourselves cannot



The cover of the book.

produce, but must accept, welcome, and embrace as gift. Only those with this simplicity of a child, this poverty of spirit, have the disposition to welcome it.

The work that awaits us this year on the text of *The Religious Sense* is this crucial. Our seriousness in tackling this work will determine our realization as persons and the contribution we can give to our fellow men and women. ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Giacomo. Leopardi, “Night Song of a Nomadic Shepherd in Asia”, in *Selected Prose and Poetry*, translated by Iris Origo and John Heath-Stubbs, Oxford University Press, London 1966, p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1997, p. 45. The religious sense is “man’s natural movement towards his First Beginning and Final End; a vague intuitive awareness that he is both responsible and at the same time dependent on Another; a natural, inchoate utterance of the soul about its mysterious relationship with the Supreme Being; a spontaneous gesture by human nature, in an attitude of adoration and supplication; the soul’s urgent longing for a personal Infinite Being, like the eye’s longing for light or a flower’s need of the sun.” It was in 1957 when, in his pastoral letter for Lent that the then-Archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Battista Montini used these words. A few months later, Luigi Giussani published the first edition of his text *The Religious Sense*; exactly 40 years later, Fr. Giussani completed his last and definitive version of this work (which is also the first volume of his fundamental Trilogy).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man. A Christian Interpretation*, vol. II, London-New York 1943, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> L. Giussani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia [An Event of Life, that is, a History]*, Edit-Il Sabato, Roma/Milano 1993, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> L. Giussani, *L’attrattiva Gesù [The Attraction that is Jesus]*, BUR, Milano 1999, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup> L. Giussani, Letter to the Fraternity, October 7, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> J. Ratzinger, transl. Henry Taylor, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2004, p. 136.

<sup>11</sup> L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Benedict XVI, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the 24th Plenary Session of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Vatican City, Friday, May 21, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*

[*The “I” is Reborn in an Encounter*], BUR, Milano 2010, p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> L. Giussani, *Time is short*. Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> L. Giussani, *L’autocoscienza del cosmo [The Self Awareness of the Cosmos]*, BUR, Milano 2000, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. Mario Vittorino, *In epistola ad Ephesios*, II, 4, 14.

<sup>18</sup> L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro*, op. cit., pp. 206-207.

<sup>19</sup> L. Giussani, *L’autocoscienza del cosmo*, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2001, pp. 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> L. Giussani, *L’attrattiva Gesù*, op. cit., pp. 286-287.

<sup>23</sup> L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, 147.

<sup>24</sup> *Lk.* 6:44.

<sup>25</sup> *2 Cor.* 5:17.

<sup>26</sup> Jacopone da Todi, «Lauda XC», in *Le Laude*, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze 1989, p. 313.

<sup>27</sup> L. Giussani, *L’uomo e il suo destino [Man and His Destiny]*, Marietti, Genova 1999, p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> L. Giussani - S. Alberto - J. Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo [Generating Traces in the History of the World]*, Rizzoli, Milano 1998, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> L. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Vol. 2: Hope*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2008, p. 105.

<sup>32</sup> L. Giussani - S. Alberto - J. Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo*, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> L. Giussani, *Tutta la terra desidera il tuo volto [All the Earth Desires Your Face]*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi) 2000, p. 124.

<sup>35</sup> L. Giussani, *La familiarità con Cristo [Familiarity with Christ]*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi) 2008, p. 135.

<sup>36</sup> *Mt.* 18:3.

<sup>37</sup> *Mt.* 5:3.