

“When have you felt fulfilled and useful?”

“TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE”

16. Vocation

by Luigi Giussani*

Only in clarity and confidence can we find the energy to act.

The event of the Spirit overturned the apostles' faint-heartedness and inspired the most intense, courageous, and dynamic adventure that the history of the human spirit has known.

“You alone, Lord, make me rest secure.”¹ The discovery of Christ as the center of all things eliminates fear and makes us sense a capacity to “possess” everything we encounter: “all are your servants, but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.”²

More precisely, this new culture demands an extremely rich concept of life: unremitting activity, unavoidable responsibility, a true “service” in every moment, every word (“whether you are eating or drinking”³); service to the *Kingdom*, that is, to that plan of the universe by which Christ heads all of reality. Everyone's existence has a meaning, which is to say that one truly exists insofar as one is in the service (a part of the whole, a “function”) of Christ's Kingdom, a function foreseen by the Ideal Himself who established the mysterious plan for all things. And *consciousness* is such insofar as it is aware that it is destined to a task, and this awareness is the encounter between God and the individual—the event of the *vocation*.

That encounter occurs fully in Christ. Everyone's vocation takes place within the ambit of the personal and mysterious reality of Christ: “You have been created in Christ Jesus.”⁴

To become aware of one's own vocation, to understand one's life by following the calling, to conceive of one's existence as in service to everything: here is the vital commitment of one's very being which Christ's Spirit plainly demands, giving one the strength to begin and to remain faithful.

The modern conception of life never shows itself so far from the Spirit of Christ as in the whole question of vocation. Today's mentality accustoms us to look to the future with a criterion focused on profit, enjoyment, and comfort. The road to choose, the person to love, the profession to undertake, the faculty or department in which to enroll—everything is determined by the criterion of absolute utility for the individual. And this seems so obvious and taken for granted that the shock of the provocation seems to be a challenge to common sense, an infatuation, an exaggeration, even to many persons of integrity. These accusations are also heard among educators who conceive of themselves as Christians or parents who are worried about the worldly success of their children. Judgments in public and private life, advice for the good life, warnings and corrections—everything is dictated by a point of view in which the total devotion to, and preoccupation with, the Kingdom is completely absent, in »

¹ Psalms 4:8.

² 1 Corinthians 3:22–3.

³ 1 Corinthians 10:31.

⁴ Ephesians 2:10.

* Source: *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2006, pp. 78-80.

» which the reality of Christ is missing. "How can I make the world work to my advantage? How can I get the most out of everything and everyone?"—these are the criteria dictated by collective wisdom and pragmatism.

The Christian mentality overturns, contradicts, and represses those questions, forcing the exact opposite to the fore: "How can I give myself as I am, serve all things, the Kingdom, and Christ evermore?" This is the only educative criterion for the human personality as redeemed by the light and strength of the Spirit of Christ.

Simple, lucid, comprehensive sincerity and resolute magnanimity as a Christian concept of our own existence can develop easily and surely only in early youth.

The profound availability of our complete life to the service of all things is also extremely important for understanding *what* it is we are called to carry out, *for understanding our personal vocation*. What I must do, what I must be—my vocation—does not normally emerge as a specific command, but as a suggestion, a proposal, an invitation. Vocation, which is the meaning of one's life, introduces itself more as a glimpse of a possibility than as something absolutely inevitable. The more difficult the task to be accomplished the truer this is. In its purest and most evocative aspect, awareness is the most discreet cue: it is inspiration. Thus one confirms one's personal worth by readily agreeing to the subtlest of possibilities.