

“What is your experience going to charitable work?”

“TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE”

17. Charity

by Luigi Giussani*

To accept life as vocation, as service to (a function of) the Whole, is to define existence as a profound destiny to *share* Reality (of which we are born and on which we continually depend) and to participate in Reality, accepting it and offering ourselves to it as to the will of God, to His Kingdom. To accept life as vocation engages our existence as *charity* (*caritas*).

Let us point out the most exceptional paradigms of love’s richness and simplicity, at the origins of the new humanity redeemed by the Spirit of Christ: “May they be so completely one.”¹

And they had the apostles called in, gave orders for them to be flogged, warned them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. And so they left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honor of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name. They preached every day both in the Temple and in private houses, and their proclamation of the Good News of Christ Jesus was never interrupted.²

As I said before, let no one take me for a fool; but if you must, then treat me as a fool and let me do a little boasting of my own ... Hebrews—my enemies—are they? So am I. Israelites? So am I. Descendants of Abraham? So am I. The servants of Christ? I must be mad to say this, but so am I, and more than they: more because I have worked harder, I have been sent to prison more often, and whipped so many times more, often almost to death. Five times I had the thirty-nine lashes from the Jews; three times I have been beaten with sticks; once I was stoned; three times I have been shipwrecked and once adrift in the open sea for a night and a day. Constantly travelling, I have been in danger from rivers and in danger from brigands, in danger from my own people and in danger from pagans; in danger in the towns; in danger in the open country, danger at sea and danger from so-called brothers. I have worked and labored, often without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty and often starving; I have been in the cold without clothes. And to leave out much more, there is my daily preoccupation: my anxiety, for all the churches. When any man has had scruples, I have had scruples with him; when any man is made to fall I am tortured. If I am to boast, then let me boast of my own feebleness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus—bless him forever—knows »

¹ John 17:23.

² Acts 5:40–2.

* Source: *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2006, pp. 80-81.

- » that I am not lying. When I was in Damascus, the Ethnarch of King Aretas put guards around the city to catch me, and I had to be let down over the wall in a hamper, through a window in order to escape.³

The first apostles truly *followed* the Master, who was describing his own soul in the parable of the Good Shepherd, where charity reveals its deep need for initiative, creativity, and vigor. "Who among you with a hundred sheep, losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the missing one till he found it? And when he found it would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders and then when he got home, call together his friends and neighbors? 'Rejoice with me,' he would say, 'I have found my sheep that was lost.'"⁴

³ 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.

⁴ Luke 15:4-6.