

“Has something happened in these last days, during Christmas break or coming back to school, which corresponded so much that it was able to re-open us to the totality of life?”

“GENERATING TRACES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD”

## 3. The Christian Event as an Encounter

by Luigi Giussani\*

### 5. THE RELIGIOUS SENSE AND FAITH

The religious sense is nothing other than the demand for totality that constitutes our reason, present in every action, since man’s every action is provoked by a need. Since this need is dictated by an aspect of the demands of our heart, the true, exhaustive answer is incommensurable. So, the religious sense is reason as awareness of reality as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Religious sense and reason are therefore the same thing. Man’s religious sense coincides with reason in its profound aspect of unflagging striving towards the ultimate meaning of reality.<sup>2</sup> It appears therefore as the most authentic application of the term reason; it indicates its boundless thrust as a thirst for totality. This boundless thrust towards infinity is what drives reason to take interest in all the factors of reality. The proper object of this thrust is the ultimate “why” of the present, the ultimate origin of the particular and of oneself. All “religious experience,” then, is born of the need for total meaning, which manifests itself as the lived intuition of the Mystery, since it is the incommensurable answer to this need. Faced with this enigmatic incommensurability, man seeks, as it were, a ground more in proportion with himself upon which to build the “site” of his relationship with the Mystery.<sup>3</sup> Thus “religions” are born. They represent the numerous expressions of that creative effort that man has always made to imagine his relationship with the Mystery.<sup>4</sup> [...]

The dynamic of *faith*, as it emerges within Christian revelation, is quite different. Here it is no longer our reason that explains, but our reason that opens up—thus perceiving the fulfillment of its dynamic—to God’s self-revelation. In this way the divine Mystery communicates its nature, its “thoughts” and “ways,” manifesting itself in time and space. While religious experience springs from the need for meaning that is awakened by the impact with the real, faith is the recognition of an exceptional Presence that corresponds totally to our destiny, and the adherence to this Presence. Faith means to recognize that what a historical Presence says of itself is true. »

<sup>1</sup> L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 57.

<sup>2</sup> L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 99.

<sup>3</sup> See L. Giussani, *At the Origin*, 12–13.

<sup>4</sup> L. Giussani, *At the Origin*, 21–8.

\* Source: L. Giussani - S. Alberto - J. Prades,  
*Generating Traces in the History of the World*,  
McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2010, pp. 15-16.

» Christian faith is the memory of a historical fact: a Man said something about Himself that others accepted as true, and that 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."<sup>5</sup> It is a Fact that happened in history: a child, born of woman, registered in the Bethlehem birth register,<sup>6</sup> who, once He had grown up, announced He was God: "The Father and I are one."<sup>7</sup> Paying attention to what that Man did and said to the point of saying, "I believe in this Man," adhering to His Presence, and affirming what He said as the truth: this is faith. Faith is an act of reason moved by the exceptional nature of a Presence that brings man to say, "This man who is speaking is truthful. He is not lying, I accept what He says."

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<sup>5</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>6</sup> See Luke 2:1-7.

<sup>7</sup> John 10:30.