

**An Incomplete Story:
Luigi Giussani and his Encounter with Modernity**

by

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2010

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the

Department of Humanities
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Spring 2015

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Abstract

Luigi Giussani (1922–2005) was an Italian Catholic philosopher and educator. He founded the lay movement Comunione e Liberazione and produced a large written body of work, including *The Religious Sense*. Particularly in that text, he developed a critique of contemporary culture intended to elucidate a religious attitude to reality that is natural to humanity and a range of contingent social conditions that obstruct that attitude. He presented those conditions as limiting the horizons of human possibility and rendering the Catholic proposal obscure. My concern is with Giussani as a figure in confrontation with modernity and liberalism, and this essay builds to an examination of his work as a critique of liberalism. It argues that this critique lacks the specificity and detail to be successful, and that this has serious consequences for his attempts to advance Catholicism as a liveable possibility.

Keywords: Giussani; liberalism; modernity; Catholicism; power; tradition

For Micah, who won't find this very interesting.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this project has been possible in large part due to the generous tolerance of those around me. Thank you to the Department of the Humanities at Simon Fraser University, and those within it, for allowing me the time to explore, and to finally bring this to a conclusion. Thanks to my friend and supervisor Christine Jones for her kindness, and for her patience with the multitude of turns my topic took, especially during the first several years. My family has also been hugely helpful and supportive during this time. Thank you Caz, David, Shoni, Nathan, Ashley, and especially Angela. Gordon and Huyen were excellent companions during this process, as was Elliot, who made this a less solitary venture and a more enjoyable one.

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|----|--|
| AC | Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action) |
| CL | Comunione e Liberazione (Communion and Liberation) |
| GS | Gioventu Studentesca (Student Youth) |

Chapter 1.

Up Three Steps and an Introduction

As I climbed for the first time the three steps at the entrance to the Liceo Berchet, where I had been sent to teach religion, it was clear to me, although I was aware of my limitations, that this was a matter of re-launching the announcement of Christianity as a present event of human interest and suitable for anyone who does not want to renounce the fulfillment of his or her hopes and expectations, as well as the use, without diminishment, of the gift of reason. All that was to follow, with both the élan and the imperfections inherent in every human effort, depended, and still depends, only on that first intuition.¹

So remembers Luigi Giovanni Giussani, the Italian Catholic priest, theologian, philosopher, and, perhaps above all else, educator. His impact upon this world includes the founding of the highly influential Catholic movement *Comunione e Liberazione* (Communion and Liberation, henceforth referred to as CL), a very substantial written body of work, and, as one finds in the words of those who encountered him in life, the tremendous kinetic impetus of "... a very sensitive and gregarious individual, a true gentleman but also one fearless in publically proclaiming what he knew to be of vital importance to society and the church."² What seemed to him most important was in fact

¹ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 4.

² John Zucchi, "Luigi Giussani, the Church, and Youth in the 1950s: A Judgement Born of an Experience," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2007): 132.

the role of that church within society, and it would be this concern which drove him up those three steps mentioned above, and “all that was to follow... .”³

There is much that can be read into that opening passage that epitomizes Giussani's particular understanding of reality and the individual's part within it. We can see the assertion of Christ as fact, as event in human history, and as something uniquely impactful upon our every moment. Reason is conceived so as not to cleave it from the realm of religious belief or from that of human emotion. Finally, there is the sense of a diminished humanity, of a reductionist self-understanding against which he would long toil in his actions, both written and otherwise.

Giussani has been published extensively, largely in his native Italian, but also in translation into other languages, including in English. It is this latter material that forms my own study's primary object of inquiry, and in this I am indebted to the work done before me by translators such as John Zucchi and Viviane Hewitt. I shall also occasionally be making reference to the movement he founded where it seems relevant as an expression of his thought and as an embodiment of his ideas and their consequences in the world.

In this chapter I will begin with a short and necessarily inexhaustive narrative of Giussani's life that will provide some historical context, both biographical and socio-religious in nature, for the ideas under discussion. This will introduce themes that are of ongoing importance in his work and for the present project. Finally, I will turn to the treatment his writing has received and to my own intended area of inquiry: Giussani's thought as it forms a critique of the culture of liberalism. Does his work contain resources sufficient to this encounter with liberalism, and if not, how are books such as *The Religious Sense* affected by the deficiency?

Born in Desio, Italy, in 1922, it has been said that Giussani gained a lasting appreciation for music and art from his father, and for religion from his mother.^{4, 5}

³ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 4.

⁴ John Zucchi, “Luigi Giussani, the Church, and Youth in the 1950s: A Judgement Born of an Experience,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2007): 132.

However, when one reads of her exclaiming to him one early morning as they walked to mass, the morning star apparent before them, “How beautiful is the world, and how great is God!”, it seems at least possible that the aesthetic tilt to his religious understanding was influenced in part by his mother.^{6, 7} As Cardinal Ratzinger expressed in his funeral homily for Giussani in 2005, “... from the very beginning, he was touched, or, better, wounded, by the desire for beauty”⁸ From a childhood “... poor in bread but rich in music ...” these passions, physical and spiritual, were synthesized in a way that would powerfully inform his engagement with reality and the questions that it posed.⁹ These wounds of beauty might call to mind the words of Rumi, or perhaps an image of Bernini’s *L’Estasi di Santa Teresa*. Each evokes the beauty that pierces rather than soothes. No passing aesthetic triviality or, to quote Ratzinger, “... beauty however banal ...”, it pulls towards the transcendent rather than to some soft comfort.¹⁰ Beauty is in this view a profound irritation, a provocation, and to know this compulsion is to suffer without immediate means of relief a sore that will not easily heal. Functionally, it draws us on: “... the beautiful wounds, but this is exactly how it summons man to his final destiny.”¹¹

Ratzinger has elsewhere recalled his own experience of such beauty, a Leonard Bernstein-conducted performance of Bach that particularly struck him.¹² He testifies that such an “... encounter with the beautiful can become the wound of the arrow that strikes the heart and in this way opens our eyes”¹³ Deeply congruent with Giussani, he then concludes “... so that later, from this experience, we take the criteria for judgment and

⁵ Davide Rondoni, ed., *Communion and Liberation: A Movement in the Church* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 30.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷ However, Jonathan Galassi has described her as a repressive figure in contrast with Giussani’s “more feckless” father.

Jonathan Galassi, et al. “An Homage to Luigi Giussani on the Occasion of the Publication of his Poems in the U.S.” *New York Encounter 2011—Infinite Desire* (New York City, 2011), 3.

⁸ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Funeral Homily for Msgr. Luigi Giussani,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31, no. 4 (2004): 685.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 685.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 685.

¹¹ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty,” A message presented to a CL meeting in August 2002. (Rimini, Italy).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

can correctly evaluate the arguments.”¹⁴ To say one is “struck by beauty” is in this sense not just a tired turn of phrase, but it is insufficient for conveying the fullness of alteration to the human person at such times. “Invaded” is the translation offered for the word Giussani chooses: “My life as a very young man was literally invaded by this.”¹⁵ It is this meaning of beauty that I think should be kept in mind when reading Giussani’s texts and the references to art, to music, and to poetry, that so often inhabit them.

It seems fair to identify Giussani’s own primary influence regarding beauty as Giacomo Leopardi, the 19th century Italian poet and philosopher whose writing he encountered and read extensively from the age of twelve, and a familiar figure for Giussani’s readers.¹⁶ Those early explorations would find harmony with Giussani’s religious sensibilities when, in what he describes as an awakening, he recalled Leopardi’s “*Alla sua Donna*” (To His Lady) during a high school lesson on the Gospel of St. John. The words of eternal longing seemed to him then “... to be begging for something that had already happened and had been announced by St. John the Baptist: ‘the word was made flesh.’”¹⁷ Giussani read in Leopardi’s longing for beauty, the form of Beauty that no particular woman’s face could entirely manifest, a search for the Christian God. It was a search without acknowledged aim of this sort, but it seemed to him to be seeking after this end none the less. The episode reads as very much the sort of moment that Ratzinger would speak of in his homily, and Joseph Weiler has noted that we can also see the importance of such moments, and the high value placed on direct personal experience more generally, in Giussani’s own teaching methods.¹⁸ Instead of only receiving lectures, students were to read Leopardi themselves, listen to music

¹⁴ Ratzinger has written that he and the Lutheran Bishop Hanselmann turned to one another and said “Anyone who has heard this, knows that the faith is true.”
Ibid.

¹⁵ Davide Rondoni, ed., Notes from an August 1989 talk given by Luigi Giussani, *Communion and Liberation: A Movement in the Church* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 109.

¹⁶ Giussani has spoken of that period as “... an interval of a month during which the poet Leopardi gripped my attention more than Our Lord.”
Ibid., 107.

¹⁷ Ibid., 109.

¹⁸ Joseph Weiler, et al. “An Homage to Luigi Giussani on the Occasion of the Publication of his Poems in the U.S.” *New York Encounter 2011—Infinite Desire* (New York City, 2011), 6.

themselves, be out in the mountains themselves, and seek experience and wounds for themselves.

Inspired by these beginnings, Giussani entered the seminary in Milan not far from his birthplace and was there ordained. Continuing his studies of theology, he then taught at the Seminary of Venegono, where he stayed from 1937 until 1954.¹⁹ He took particular interest in writers from American Protestant traditions as well as from the Russian Orthodox Church, but his studies were not limited to such sources; in particular, the arts still pulled at him as they would continue to all his life. While the present project is not so much concerned with his use of Orthodox concepts or Protestant thinkers, we will return at times to Giussani's connection with art and with literature. In reading his books, it is difficult not to notice their prevalence throughout, the artistic alongside the anecdotal, and often enough the two combined, as his primary modes of expression. They are vital as illustration but, as we shall see, are also strongly indicative of his own most foundational philosophical understandings.

It was during his time as a professor that the moment occurred that diverted his path significantly and urged him towards those three steps that opened this chapter.²⁰ While travelling by train to the Adriatic coast, Giussani entered into a conversation, an encounter and an exchange of the sort which so many of his anecdotes draw upon. This particular one was with a group of young students whom he found to be "...shockingly ignorant of the nature and aim of Christian life and the Church."²¹ Indeed, this discovery was so shocking that, "... flabbergasted by [the students'] frighteningly total ignorance ...", an ignorance he elsewhere has said he had to "attribute ... to their disgust and indifference toward the Church itself", he felt moved to take leave of the seminary and to teach at the Liceo Berchet.^{22, 23} In doing so, he left, by Angelo Scola's estimation, "... a

¹⁹ Robert Di Pede, trans., "Luigi Giussani on the Church and Society in the 1950s and '60s: Interview by Robi Ronza," Appendix to Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 258.

²⁰ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²² Luigi Giussani, "Open Christianity," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, trans. John Zucchi 10, no. 4 (2007): 151.

chair of theology of great prestige (and not only in the enormous Diocese of Milan) for obscure work among students... .”²⁴

Giussani writes of taking those three steps at the liceo for the first time and contemplating the task before him: the repositioning of a Christian reality as relevant to the everyday realities of the students within.²⁵ The Italian cultural context of the time would not make this task any easier. His assessment of that environment will be familiar to those who have read Alasdair MacIntyre on religiosity in Victorian England or David Schindler's depiction of contemporary American religious culture.²⁶ Catholicism had a dwindling grasp on the people of Italy who, to Giussani, appeared religious in name only: conventions were adhered to, though their foundations were no longer confirmed with belief. He saw that there prevailed a disregard for any such issue, for the Church's attention seemed fixed upon those numbers still in attendance. As to this, Giussani expressed amazement that the Church's leadership seemed content with only a dozen attendees at meetings arranged by Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action, henceforth referred to as AC), an organization of some substantial power.²⁷

Giussani identified three factors in the religiosity of Italian high school students of the time: first, belief went no deeper than self-identification; second, social behaviour within the school was unrelated to faith, and this irrelevance of faith to that behaviour was unreflectively accepted, a disconnect also prevalent in the general public; and third, a climate open to scepticism allowed for the attacks of some teachers upon religion, but this climate did not nurture discussion around such acts, only an openness to the attacks

²³ Robert Di Pede, trans., “Luigi Giussani on the Church and Society in the 1950s and '60s: Interview by Robi Ronza,” Appendix to Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 258.

²⁴ Angelo Scola, “A Style of Thought,” trans. Patrick Stevenson, in *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 6.

²⁵ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 4.

²⁶ See for example “The Religious Sense in American Culture” or his vigorous exchange with George Weigel on the question asked by Ratzinger: “Is America Bourgeois?”

²⁷ John Zucchi, “Luigi Giussani, the Church, and Youth in the 1950s: A Judgement Born of an Experience,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2007): 138.

themselves.²⁸ The following quotation seems to me one of his clearest statements on the period:

Halfway through the 1950s, as I have mentioned elsewhere, the common opinion was that the Church was still a solid and deeply rooted presence in Italian society, but this opinion was founded on a strength of the past, and expressed itself on one hand through mass participation in Catholic worship, and on the other—paradoxically—through a strictly political power, very much exploited from an ecclesial point of view; so much so that a large part of both ecclesial and political organisms—often the latter was the flip side of the former—showed that they were not aware of the importance of the problem of education and therefore of cultural creativity.²⁹

Here again we see the crucial place that education holds in Giussani's assessment of a human life and the health of the Catholic tradition, as well as the degree of disregard he thought many people had for something so important. He connects education with a concern for Catholic practice as a vital one in society, a living truth in the culture capable of energizing life rather than a discrete and private pursuit. Where worship was still being widely undertaken he saw in this only an echo of what was once robust and urgent. It was, in summary, an effect, but it was no longer a cause.

The era was one in which the following formulation was possible, by Giussani's account even dominant:

God has nothing concrete to do with man. God is now extrinsic to human cares and human problems. Within this sphere, man is his own measure, his own master, the source both of the formulation of his plans and of the energy needed to bring them about, the origin even of the ethical intention implicit in all he does. Thus, even if God does exist, within the sphere of human problems it is as if he did not.³⁰

²⁸ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Rosanna Frongia (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 31–32.

²⁹ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 4.

³⁰ Luigi Giussani, "Religious Awareness in Modern Man," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 1 (1998): 114.

The manner of negation described in this quotation is perhaps more dramatic even than a powerfully atheistic competing truth claim could be. While the latter tends to summon up the idea of God so as to challenge it, a provocation which may then elicit an equal response, the former entails an absence which one gradually ceases to be aware of. The question itself, that of God's existence, is emptied by increments until it simply becomes no longer important, until, in the words of Cornelio Fabro, "If God does exist, he doesn't matter."³¹ As Giussani notes, the more engaged and actively involved in their own agency people are, the more useless an appendage such a God will seem, and so the equation shifts, becoming something else: if God doesn't matter, he doesn't exist.

One evaluation of the period which Dario Zadra identifies as parallel to Giussani's is that of Augusto del Noce. Del Noce refers to Gramsci's idea that to hold political power while surrendering cultural hegemony is counterproductive as that force will only "... inexorably damage the expressed principles which had at the start promoted it."^{32, 33} He goes on to find this historically expressed in the Christian Democrat party of Italy administering over years of unprecedented Italian secularization.³⁴ It is a conclusion that Zadra sees Giussani as also having arrived at, that in Italy "... the Catholics had forfeited their cultural politics for a secularized and immanentist interpretation of life."³⁵ They had "... politely eliminated themselves from public life, from culture, from popular

³¹ Quoted in Luigi Giussani, "Religious Awareness in Modern Man," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 1 (1998): 114.

³² Dario Zadra, "Comunione e Liberazione: A Fundamentalist Idea of Power," in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 148.

³³ Augusto del Noce, "Introduction" to "Concilio e Postconcilio: Tredici Anni Della Nostra Storia" in *Il Sabato*, quoted in Dario Zadra, "Comunione e Liberazione: A Fundamentalist Idea of Power," in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 148.

³⁴ Dario Zadra, "Comunione e Liberazione: A Fundamentalist Idea of Power," in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 148.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

reality, amidst the encouraging applause and the heartfelt consensus of the political and cultural forces that were planning to replace them on the national stage.”³⁶

An aspect of this withdrawal is in the sphere of education. There, Giussani identified that most “... Christian educators—like the rest of the Catholic intelligentsia of that era—applied assiduously the principle of the substantial separation between religious and temporal spheres.”³⁷

Following some abstract ideal of the state of nature, they prided themselves on teaching without proposing any world vision, and failed to communicate what they were (or, for that matter, what they were not). For this reason, they neither created nor encouraged a single stance that was cultural, or Christian, or respectful of Christianity. Be not surprised that all this took place in the very city of Milan, at the main campus of l’Universita Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, even if that university is the largest cultural institution in Italy for Catholics.³⁸

In the schools, as elsewhere, Catholic actors were absenting themselves from cultural engagement and in doing so were both conceding the stage to other voices and acting upon the dualism that Giussani would take such issue with. It should be noted that for all of his writing regarding the Church’s importance, and that of the papal office, Giussani was highly critical of the dualistic attitudes he saw it embracing: the sacred and spiritual as set apart from the temporal and secular, and public life from private religion. The Catholic elite was, he believed, complicit in abandoning Italian Catholics to the forces that emerged as they withdrew from the spaces of public life and from concern for culture and education:

In our opinion [i.e., of CL], too many Christian stances today are dualistic, resulting from a particular interpretation of Maritain’s thought, among other things. Indeed, we could say that dualism was unfortunately the guiding principle of the better part of almost all of the [Christian] formation

³⁶ Jaca Book, ed., *Il Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione: Conversazione con Robi Ronza* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1987), 19, quoted in Angelo Scola, “A Style of Thought,” trans. Patrick Stevenson, in *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 8.

³⁷ Robert Di Pedè, trans., “Luigi Giussani on the Church and Society in the 1950s and ‘60s: Interview by Robi Ronza,” Appendix to Robert Di Pedè, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 262.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 262–263.

advanced by men of the Church in these last ten years [i.e., since 1976].³⁹

This withdrawal contributed to an environment that was inconducive, even hostile, to Giussani's proposal and provided much of its impetus.

Giussani would encounter resistance from the voices of the secular world and of established anti-Catholicism, but he would also face opposition from the Catholic elite in the region, by his own perception almost in its entirety.⁴⁰ There flourished an attitudinal separation of the religious and the temporal, and, as a result, a relegation of faith to abstraction. Faith, in this environment, was categorically sequestered away from the fields of cultural engagement and of reason. Fossilized, and withdrawn from dialogue, it lost its creative force in the public sphere. As a result, there appeared no strong Catholic proposal that might adequately and practically respond to the questions of the young.

Giussani writes of those "... theoretical and existential problems that surface most dramatically in the teenage years" as one who views this as an entirely serious expression of yearning for the other, inherent to us all regardless of culture, a yearning for the God to which all of reality is oriented as signs.⁴¹ We will return to this conception of reality as indicating the transcendent, but it is noteworthy here that the dramatic emergence of these questions is for Giussani a time of crucial importance in human development, not merely the passing emotions of youth that may be easily disregarded. Indeed, as we shall see, he would continue to challenge this type of dismissal, for he would see it arise systematically as a prevailing characterization of the religious inquiry that he wished to promote and pursue.⁴²

³⁹ Robert Di Pede, trans., Jaca Book, ed., *Il Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione: Conversazione con Robi Ronza* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1986), 19, quoted in Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴² Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 59–62.

In surveying the difficulties which the era presented for him, Giussani has also remarked upon a lingering fascism and a growing pantheistic religious attitude among Italy's young, traceable to the influence of Giulio Evola.⁴³ Fascism's ongoing presence was, he argued, in part facilitated by the "masked despotism" with which a generation of leaders—political, religious and otherwise—had in many respects carried on unchanged from their careers spent in a fascist society.⁴⁴ It existed sometimes as an explicit attitude but was more commonly manifested in a "... style of thought ..." or "... appeared unwittingly in the cultural matrix ...".⁴⁵ Of particular interest to Giussani, it would also be apparent in its appeal to many young Italians as a mustering call against communism, the antagonistic other above all others.⁴⁶

A history of mid-20th century Italian Marxism and of Catholic pre-and-post-conciliar responses is hardly within the purview of the present project; for now it suffices to acknowledge that Giussani was abundantly aware in beginning his work at the liceo that while there were no meetings of Catholic students, there was a highly visible body of Marxist youth. In one anecdote of the time he remarks to a group of Christian students "... in the student association assemblies all you see are the Communists and the Monarchists-Fascists. And Christians?"⁴⁷

During his engagement at the liceo, Giussani's interventions were practical, seeking through development of Gioventu Studentesca (Student Youth, henceforth referred to as GS, then under the umbrella of AC) to address the lack of Catholics'

⁴³ Robert Di Pede, trans., "Luigi Giussani on the Church and Society in the 1950s and '60s: Interview by Robi Ronza," Appendix to Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 261–262.

⁴⁴ Jaca Book, ed., *Il Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione: Conversazione con Robi Ronza* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1987), 16, quoted in John Zucchi, "Luigi Giussani, the Church, and Youth in the 1950s: A Judgement Born of an Experience," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2007): 137.

⁴⁵ Robert Di Pede, trans., "Luigi Giussani on the Church and Society in the 1950s and '60s: Interview by Robi Ronza," Appendix to Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 261–262.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁴⁷ Jaca Book, ed., *Il Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione: Conversazione con Robi Ronza* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1987), 22, quoted in John Zucchi, "Luigi Giussani, the Church, and Youth in the 1950s: A Judgement Born of an Experience," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2007): 139.

activity and visibility as Catholics. These interventions included the group's meetings, known as *il raggio* (translated as "the ray" or "the spoke" of a wheel), which were actions of dialogue proposed as "... the mutual communication of ourselves through the signs of words, gestures, and attitudes."⁴⁸ In the *raggio*, a term still in use within and with regard to CL, participants' concerns and experiences since the previous meeting were solicited and addressed. Each week a theme would be put forward, sometimes drawn from current events, whether global or local in scope. Those present were invited to hold what they heard up against their own experiences and judge its veracity for themselves. As we shall see, this is very much an expression of Giussani's own epistemological ideas and the experiential verification they entail.

Following years at the liceo and at l'Universita Cattolica di Milano where Giussani took on a lectureship in 1964, he would, at the invitation of Archbishop Giovanni Colombo, leave on sabbatical in 1966 and pursue further studies in North American Protestantism. Upon his return he was asked to cease any engagement with the movements, by Di Pede's reading a move driven by discomfort with Giussani's students' Marxist entanglements.⁴⁹ The period which followed, one of social turmoil in Italy and elsewhere, posed many difficulties for GS. Its membership was drawn in large numbers to the possibility, the necessity even, of social revolution, which was perhaps felt as a natural culmination of the group's cultural engagement.⁵⁰ Davide Rondoni's reading of GS's collapse does differ slightly from this. He indicates ongoing developments begun in 1964 which saw the group's leadership moving away from Giussani's ideas.⁵¹ In this account, the split from Giussani's influence is heavily emphasized, and the crisis is described as "... not a *consequence* [Rondoni's italics] of the events of 1968"⁵² However, he still indicates the role that the Marxist appeal played in GS's decline, concluding that "In 1968, finally, many of those GS leaders thought they had found in the

⁴⁸ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 35.

⁴⁹ Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 4.

⁵⁰ Nancy J. Davis & Robert V. Robinson, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 88, 94.

⁵¹ Davide Rondoni, ed., *Communion and Liberation: A Movement in the Church* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 50–51.

ideals that hegemonized the so-called 'student movement' the complete fulfillment of their commitment to faith."⁵³

These years would see the protests of 1968, including those at the university in Milan which Giussani would have seen first hand. No less momentous across the Catholic world, there were also the myriad changes and responses provoked by the Second Vatican Council's conclusion in 1965, and GS was hardly alone in its difficulties. This was a period in which AC, its parent organization and well established "... oldest and noblest nest of Catholic laity ...", also lost a large number of members as it sought and arguably failed to respond to the events of the time.⁵⁴ Massimo Faggioli, in his discussion of Italian Catholic lay movements in the late 1960s, describes this shortcoming as the "... inability to bridge the competing demands for renewal and preservation of traditions."⁵⁵

Giussani viewed GS's identity as having been lost in this period to a vague activism expressed in utopian projects of the sort he would later write of in *The Religious Sense*.⁵⁶ He argued that these endeavours, no matter how humanitarian their ends may appear, serve as reductionist impositions upon humanity because inquiries into the very nature and meaning of reality and life then suffer an artificial veiling: the energy that drives such inquiry, and the human actor of the present, is sacrificed to an abstract future. What he viewed as the full possibilities of human nature become obscured in a process comprehensible as one "... of adaptation and surrender to the environment."⁵⁷ As we shall see, the risks of this sort posed by our social environments are a subject of concern for Giussani, and they occupy a substantial portion of *The Religious Sense*.

⁵² Ibid., 51.

⁵³ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁴ Massimo Faggioli, "The New Elites of Italian Catholicism: 1968 and the New Catholic Movements," *The Catholic Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (2012): 23.

⁵⁵ Ibid.: 27.

⁵⁶ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 62.

⁵⁷ Luigi Giussani, "Dall'utopia alla presenza," *Dall'utopia alla presenza (1975–1978)* (Milan: RCS Libri S.p.A., 2006), 63–64, quoted in Massimo Faggioli, "The New Elites of Italian Catholicism: 1968 and the New Catholic Movements," *The Catholic Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (2012): 28.

When he returned in 1969 it was to rebuild the movement under the name *Comunione e Liberazione*, and unlike AC, CL would continue to thrive. Faggioli identifies the group as having been particularly successful at this time in using "... social tactics similar to those of the 1968 leaders to affirm its presence and power in the heart of Italian Catholicism" while rejecting their Marxist foundations.⁵⁸ Nancy J. Davis and Robert V. Robinson make a similar point, citing, among other examples, the gathering at Rimini as inspired by the Italian Communist Party's *Feste de l'Unita* (Unity Festivals) to which they stand as a Catholic alternative.⁵⁹

Though a participatory rather than registrative understanding of membership in the movement makes any firm assessment of numbers impossible, CL has been characterized by Davis and Robinson as "... today the most powerful religiously orthodox movement in Italy ..." and has also achieved something of an international presence, though nowhere else so strong.⁶⁰ This importance is well reflected by an ongoing, and by all accounts close, relationship with the Vatican, both on the part of Giussani and of the movement.⁶¹ In 1975, Pope Paul VI followed the Palm Sunday Mass by echoing the words with which he had encouraged Giussani years earlier as Archbishop of Milan: "go on in the same way."⁶² It is a blessing that John Paul II would also bestow upon the movement, addressing its members on its 30th anniversary—September 29, 1984—and urging them on in their efforts; just one year earlier, he had honoured Giussani as Monsignor with the title of Honorary Prelate to His Holiness.^{63, 64} While Giussani had

⁵⁸ Massimo Faggioli, "The New Elites of Italian Catholicism: 1968 and the New Catholic Movements," *The Catholic Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (2012): 31.

⁵⁹ Nancy J. Davis & Robert V. Robinson, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 95.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶¹ Davis and Robinson trace the ascendancy of this relationship to the movement's spearheading of Italian campaigns against divorce and abortion in the 1970s.

Nancy J. Davis & Robert V. Robinson, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 96–98.

⁶² Davide Rondoni, ed., *Communion and Liberation: A Movement in the Church* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 44.

⁶³ Davide Rondoni, ed., "Pope John Paul II Addresses CL on its Thirtieth Anniversary," *Communion and Liberation: A Movement in the Church* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 131–137.

⁶⁴ Davide Rondoni, ed., *Communion and Liberation: A Movement in the Church* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 33.

been critical of attitudes within the Church, he would, it seems, come to enjoy at least papal support, though It should be noted that these events, and this relationship, ought to be understood in the context of a general shift in papal favour towards the new movements, and not only towards Giussani and CL.

We have already read of Cardinal Ratzinger's admiration for Giussani in his funeral homily, a funeral for which Italian parliament adjourned so that its members might be present.⁶⁵ It was not the first or only example of Ratzinger's support for Giussani's ideas. He has contributed an introduction to Massimo Camisasca's *Comunione e Liberazione: Le Origini (1954–1968)*, and in the encyclical which he would publish as Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, the alignment of at least a very important portion of his thought with that of Giussani is clear.⁶⁶ There, Tracey Rowland has noted, "... he announce[d] that being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea but the encounter with an event, a person who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."⁶⁷ It is a presentation of Christianity that echoes not only his earlier writings but also, as we shall see, those of Giussani, a resemblance that Rowland also remarks upon.⁶⁸

Luigi Giussani died in 2005, but his influence persists. Pope Francis has contributed to a text on Giussani's work with a piece originally presented as a lecture on the occasion of *The Religious Sense's* Spanish-language publication.⁶⁹ There, Bergoglio focuses on the importance of wonder, the Biblical notion of heart, and Giussani's re-uniting of faith and reason. He also speaks of Giussani's impact upon his own life, saying "For many years now, his writings have inspired me to reflect and have helped me to pray. They have taught me to be a better Christian... ." ⁷⁰ Giussani, he continues, "... has

⁶⁵ Nancy J. Davis & Robert V. Robinson, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 108.

⁶⁶ Massimo Camisasca, *Comunione e Liberazione: il Riconoscimento (1976–1984)* (Milano: San Paolo, 2006).

⁶⁷ Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: the Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 66.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 66–67.

⁶⁹ Jorge Mario Bergoglio, "For Man," in *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

⁷⁰ Ibid., 79.

caused a wealth of individuals and movements to rise up outside the pastoral structures and programs, movements that are offering miracles of new life within the Church.”⁷¹

Over the years, the annual CL gathering at Rimini has grown to an estimated 700,000–800,000 attendees, including many in high political office, and the movement's endeavours have similarly expanded: Jaca Book, the Milan publishing house; the Cooperativa Universitaria Studio e Lavoro, an avenue into student life through which a variety of services is offered; labour groups offering a Catholic alternative to Marxist workplace liberation; Movimento Popolare, the unofficially linked political wing that brought increased visibility to the movement but also attacks—written and physical—and at least a hint of scandal; each are among examples of what Davis and Robinson have characterized as the creation of a parallel state.^{72, 73} The aim of all of these extensions of the movement is, in the words of Roberto Formigoni (President of Lombardy from 1995 to 2013, and then an Italian senator), “... to live an experience of communion that involves every dimension of human life, that realizes an experience of concrete liberation, including the social possession of the means of production.”⁷⁴ It is a vision of life, and thus of culture, as entirely penetrated by an encounter with Christ that will be familiar to readers of Giussani. An expression of one aspect of this, in practical terms, is Compagnia delle Opere, described in its own “Executive Summary” as a loose organization of “... 35,000 CL inspired or affiliated businesses in Italy, linked in a complex network with 1,100 non-profit social service organizations”, in addition to a significantly lesser presence in seventeen other countries.⁷⁵ Where this is sufficiently

⁷¹ Ibid., 79.

⁷² John L. Allen Jr., “Italy’s biggest public event; What Comunione e Liberazione is; CL in the USA; Spreading the movement; Cardinal Simonis of Holland; A report from Kenya; Women and Islam.” *National Catholic Reporter* 4, no. 45 (2005).

Luca Marcolivio, “Rimini '11 Closes With 800,000 Participants,” *Zenit.org* (August 29, 2011).

⁷³ Nancy J. Davis & Robert V. Robinson, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 89.

⁷⁴ In Gordon Urquhart, *The Pope’s Armada* (London: Bantam Press, 1995), 269, quoted in Nancy J. Davis & Robert V. Robinson, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 100.

⁷⁵ Nancy J. Davis & Robert V. Robinson, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 102.

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developed, CL participants can move within a kind of Christian society within society, shopping, eating, banking, and seeking education or medical attention.

The pervasive and varied nature of CL's endeavours, along with its proximity to the Vatican and more secular institutions of power, has not been pleasing to all observers. There were accusations in the 1990s that affiliated politicians had acted in the interests of businesses associated with the Compagnia delle Opere, and the scandal that followed with investigations into corruption and organized crime connections was instrumental in the Democrazia Christiana party's demise.^{76, 77} More recently, Italian journalist Ferruccio Pinotti's 2010 book *La Lobby di Dio* (God's Lobby) has brought negative attention to the movement with his focus on its immense influence on Italian society.⁷⁸ In particular, he points to apparent impositions upon personal freedom, a perpetuation of a system of patronage, allegations of fraud in regard to Compagnia delle Opere's involvement in the health-care system, and the movement's relationships with figures ranging from former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to Bank of Italy governor Mario Draghi (now President of the European Central Bank). While no English edition exists as of yet, Madeleine Johnson summarizes the book's characterization as that of a movement "... more powerful than Opus Dei, more well-oiled than freemasonry, and more 'plugged in' than Confindustria, Italy's manufacturer's association."⁷⁹ She quotes Eugenio Scalfari, an editor of *La Repubblica*, as stating "Not even the Mafia has so much power. In hospitals, healthcare, universities ...", but perhaps this claim should be understood as hyperbole.⁸⁰

Allegations of outright criminal activity aside, one's view of this colourful imagery of a society within society will likely depend upon whether one sees it as the "insidious" action within the public sphere of those carrying a hostile belief system or rather the successful cultural articulation of a set of background understandings to which one's own

⁷⁶ These investigations concerned the party and its politicians, some of whom were affiliated with Movimento Popolare, not CL itself.

⁷⁷ Nancy J. Davis & Robert V. Robinson, *Claiming Society for God: Religious Movements and Social Welfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 98–99.

⁷⁸ Madeleine Johnson, "Insidious Ciellini," *The American* (May 13th, 2011).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Ibid.

are sympathetic. Though some may view with suspicion such worldly activity on the part of a spiritual movement, these activities reflect Giussani's idea of a religiosity that is not isolated in a silo for private moments and Sunday practice but is to emerge and be acted out through all aspects of one's life.

Another unflattering portrayal of CL and its founder is the narrative of suspicion in Gordon Urquhart's *God's Armada*.⁸¹ Complete with a rear cover that features a slightly threatening papal silhouette and the equally ominous caption "We have a sect of our own", attributed to Pope John Paul II, the book is an attempted investigation into the nature of three new Catholic movements: CL, Neocatechumenal Way, and Focolare. All of these are presented as cults of personality, fiercely conservative, and now institutionally entrenched in Catholic society, dangerously so in the author's view. Regarding Focolare, Urquhart has much to offer, having achieved in nine years some seniority as a member of its British community. The book is of interest for these personal experiences it relates and also for its portrayal of developments within John Paul II's Vatican and the background this provides for shifting attitudes in Church policy regarding the movements. However, Urquhart relies heavily on his familiarity with Focolare in turning a lens upon the other two movements where he attempts to draw out similarities. Unfortunately, in his treatment of CL, he seems short on material of substance.

Urquhart's portrayal, such as it is, is highly critical. He depicts a slavish devotion to authority within the movement, to Giussani and to the Pope, often at the expense of intermediary figures such as the bishops; an aggressive, polemical even, engagement with a series of adversaries, including an apparent obsession with Masonic conspiracy as a sort of late-century stand in for Marxism, the old foe; and a worrying capacity for identity nullification that features more prominently in anecdotes regarding the other movements, but which he claims also emerges from CL membership, citing the emphasis upon a "dynamic of following" as one contributing factor.⁸²

⁸¹ Gordon Urquhart, *The Pope's Armada* (London: Bantam Press, 1995).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 198.

As to Giussani himself, and his “... all but impenetrable” works, Urquhart describes him as writing “... in the gloriously abstract terms peculiar to CL.”⁸³ In fairness, Giussani's written style does at times leave him open to such accusations of relying on vagaries, but the quotation Urquhart provides as an example does not seem to be one of those.⁸⁴ Urquhart also presents Giussani's work as espousing an ideology that is anti-modern and anti-intellectual, stifles curiosity and inquiry, and emphasizes submission to the community to a dehumanizing degree.

I have included Urquhart's book here to acknowledge the antagonistic reaction that Giussani and his movement sometimes provoked and because it is one of few English language writings on the topic. Dario Zadra, in his contribution to the multi-volume *Fundamentalism Project*, “Comunione e Liberazione: A Fundamentalist Idea of Power,” takes a more academic approach to some of the issues raised by Urquhart and gives a similar presentation of CL's attitude to the external world.^{85, 86} Zadra chooses to focus on CL in Italy as the site of Giussani's authoritative presence and leadership, and also the origin of much of the written material produced that maintains the movement's internationally consistent culture. Aside from cataloguing the movement's institutions and

⁸³ Ibid., 140 & 279.

⁸⁴ This is the quoted passage:

“In many of its directive methods, whether pastoral or cultural, [the Church] often seems hypnotized by a sort of neo-enlightenment mentality, by the assumption, in the final analysis, of a kind of protestant attitude; a position in which personal interpretation plays a decisive role and morality tends to be reduced to the sphere of social problems, or else of ethical themes most acceptable to the majority.”

Ibid., 140.

⁸⁵ Dario Zadra, “Comunione e Liberazione: A Fundamentalist Idea of Power,” in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 124–148.

⁸⁶ Zadra's depiction is as follows:

In [CL's] telling of the story, this evil world may be saved by the redemptive activity of their own movement. Modernity serves as the counterfigure against which the movement struggles, the idea against which they define themselves. Inside the movement, the event of Christ and submission to religious authorities are central; outside the movement, modernity shoves aside all religious sensibilities. To a culture defined as atheistic and to a world power considered totalitarian, CL opposes a world of human beings made free by their faith in the event of Christ and by the authority of the Church.

Dario Zadra, “Comunione e Liberazione: A Fundamentalist Idea of Power,” in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 131.

activities, and contextualizing its response to modernity and to political power, Zadra writes of the attitude towards authority exhibited by the movement. Perhaps best described as a sociological treatment of the CL movement, Zadra's article has strengths, but owing to this methodology engages very little with CL's founder. Indeed, as mentioned above, while CL has received some attention in the context of the late-20th century growth in Catholic lay movements, there is not much published work in English regarding Giussani. The writings that do exist, while not necessarily lacking in quality, are largely those of friends and family, ranging from close associates and those active within the group to long-standing theological allies.⁸⁷

A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani is one such work by Giussani associates, and Cardinals, Angelo Scola, Charles Caffara, and Jorge Mario Bergoglio (at the time still a cardinal); frequent ally David Schindler; Professor Giorgio Feliciani, whose association with Giussani goes back to the time of GS; then-President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Cardinal James Stafford; Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, a leader of sorts for the movement in the United States; and Javier Prades, who collaborated in the creation of Giussani's *Generating Traces in the History of the World: New Traces of the Christian Experience*.^{88, 89} However, it also includes contributors such as a professor in Buddhist Studies at Koyasan University in Shingen Takagi; Afghan diplomat and, among other things, Rumi scholar, Ravan Farhadi; and philosopher and rabbi Neil Gillman. Drawn primarily from lectures and intended to demonstrate the dialogical spark provided by Giussani's writing, the book is, as its title expresses, an introduction to a broad variety of topics in Giussani's work, and I shall occasionally reference it here.

The journal *Communio* has been another home for the discussion of Giussani, with articles appearing by, among others, Mary Katherine Tillman, Stanley Hauerwas,

⁸⁷ In many cases, as with CL, there is a certain fluidity to this application of the term laity, as actors from within the movement enter the clergy and are elevated within it.

⁸⁸ *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

⁸⁹ Luigi Giussani, et al., *Generating Traces in the History of the World: New Traces of the Christian Experience*, trans. Patrick Stevenson (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

Angelo Scola, and Antonio Lopez.⁹⁰ David Schindler has been featured, examining the argumentative method and sense of proof in *The Religious Sense*.⁹¹ He also takes up Giussani to address his own interest in contemporary American culture as it affects, or rather imposes upon, the possibilities for Catholic life, a topic we shall return to below.

The focus of my own thesis is the work of Luigi Giussani as a critique of liberalism and the problems that emerge when it is understood as such. I recognize that this is not how he would characterize his aims, that his is not first and foremost a project intended to hold a mirror up to liberalism and to expose its flaws. We can read of Giussani's desire to "... re-launch the announcement of Christianity ..." in that quotation above.⁹² Though my own paper is not a theological one, I do not want to skim over this announcement as Giussani's driving motivation, his ultimate concern, but I do think that the critical element to his work ought to be taken seriously, and I would argue that shortcomings in this area have significant consequences for the project as a whole.

I came to this topic inspired by Alasdair MacIntyre's "virtues project", as it is often called.⁹³ In particular, I was prompted by his well-developed treatment of tradition, specifically that of liberalism as the tradition that presents itself as tradition's absence or nullification. The result, MacIntyre summarized, was a field of debate made up of "...

- ⁹⁰ M. Katherine Tillman, "Mentality and Personality: Newman and Giussani on Catholic Education," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 30, no. 1 (2003).
Stanley Hauerwas, "How Risky is the Risk of Education? Random Reflections from the American Context," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 30, no. 1 (2003).
Angelo Scola, "Education and Integral Experience," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 30, no. 1 (2003).
Antonio Lopez, "Growing Human: The Experience of God and of Man in the Work of Luigi Giussani," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 37, no. 2 (2010).
- ⁹¹ David L. Schindler, "Luigi Giussani on the Religious Sense and the Cultural Situation of our Time," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 1 (1998).
Schindler has elsewhere in the same journal referenced Giussani in his response to the titular question "Is Truth Ugly?"
David L. Schindler, "Is Truth Ugly? Moralism and the Convertibility of Being and Love," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 27, no. 4 (2000).
- ⁹² Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 4.
- ⁹³ *After Virtue, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry, and Dependent Rational Animals*.

conservative liberals, liberal liberals, and radical liberals.”⁹⁴ This idea that a defined position presents itself as the neutral field of debate itself, absorbing potential external threats within it, reminded me in some ways of the picture Giussani offered. In his writing, Giussani positioned his own epistemological proposal against a self-reinforcing set of understandings emerging from the Enlightenment, the components of which one had to completely reconceptualise in order to think one’s way out of. In both cases there was a picture of a hegemonic order that defined the very landscape on which debate occurred.

Giussani also had a very lively sense of tradition, one in which the attitudes of triumphant disposal of tradition and its uncritical acceptance were both forcefully addressed, the former cast as a self-inflicted wound and the latter as an ossification. Both were considered damaging to our ability to engage with reality, to make judgements, to arrive at truths. Clearly one’s relationship to one’s tradition plays an enormous role here in the development of the human person, but I wondered if Giussani’s work suffered for the lack of a more well-defined image of tradition. It seemed that the hostile storm of our surroundings that Giussani writes about, that violence the individual is loosed into without tradition’s moorings, might be more clearly understood as itself a constellation of traditions, and that something closer to a MacIntyrean understanding could have allowed him to produce a much less nebulous threat. For lack of analysis of that “storm”, and a more well-defined critique to match, did Giussani’s program for liberation come up short of its potential? In my project, I set out to assess his resources and their suitability for an encounter with liberalism.

Giussani’s intentions make this a less amorphous task than it initially may sound. His books are not intended as works of theory, abstract pieces within their own playgrounds and rules of operations. He sought always to make practical interventions with writing that responded directly to the issues experienced by those around him, his peers and the youths he worked with and taught. As such, success can be judged with that aim of applied practice in mind. Where, as we shall see, he seeks to show paths to the freedom of his understanding and to allow us the full use of our religious sense, I am

⁹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 394.

concerned with his success in clearly conveying the details of our constraint, for though that is not his primary goal, it seems to me a vital step.

Giussani's books have not yet received a great deal of English language academic attention, and my particular topic even less. I would single out Robert de Pede's doctoral dissertation, which I make reference to in my paper, as noting some of the same issues as I do, though his aims and methods differ substantially.⁹⁵ However, I think Giussani deserves our attention, as an influential voice within a substantial tradition of course, but also because of the kind of loving ambition he held for humanity.

One of the things that comes through very clearly in Giussani's writing is this genuine fondness for humans. Not such a common thing in itself, it is paired with very high aspirations for human potential and destiny. We are all, as humans, inherently beings of destiny, living a drama that follows a path of beauty or falls into Augustinian sadness at the absence of the good, and this drama plays itself out through every small moment of the day. It is another very appealing, but also demanding aspect to Giussani's thought, this emphasis on the everyday, this total commitment to life that his proposal requires: to hone one's judgement, to live a communicative life, a good life, to be engaged with the ultimate questions of life.

Giussani set out to explore a particularly Catholic problem, that of what he viewed as collapsing authentic belief, ignored and in no small way caused by those in institutional power. However, he widened his assessment to something much broader in application, and as a critic of contemporary life, Giussani has a great deal to offer. His writing on experience stands out as suggesting a number of possible applications and directions for study, as do his epistemological proposals and the critique they form of our very understandings of reason and knowledge acquisition. I chose the area I am focusing on because it seems to me to contain lapses that significantly damage his efforts in *The Religious Sense*.

In that text he most clearly presents his case for a particular method, one which takes into account the barriers to what he would understand to be authentic religious

belief. *The Religious Sense* is intended as a road through these obstacles, a suggestion for engaging with reality, and an invitation to test his hypothesis by living it, and the text represents maybe the best expression of his primary goal. It then seems worth further investigation that there appear to be problems with his presentation of those barriers. If the threats which he makes such vehement claims about are rendered as mystifications, then surely this will be detrimental to the reader's understanding of the method of liberation itself. I refer to the reader's understanding in part because it is Giussani's intent that he or she be able to apply his ideas practically, but also because it is not entirely clear to me that Giussani is in fact wrong, or that his own understanding is incomplete. Rather, I am asserting only that he has conveyed his understanding incompletely.

Given my sense that there are limiting elements to Giussani's presentation, the necessary method was to search for them. One can easily point to isolated passages of his language as overflowing in dramatics with little clarification, and there are examples of this that may cause one suspicion that certain points here are not as well established as they might be. What I looked for, though, were the pieces that he relied heavily upon but had not invested with detail or clarity, and where the wider argument seemed to suffer as a result. Where he intended liberation and a program of de-alienation, these were pieces that instead contributed to mystification as they were evoked again and again.

I structured my paper from the start as a story, a brief story of Giussani. It seems appropriate to begin that way given his own heavy reliance on anecdote and on narrative, on experience and meaning and the way they allow us to communicate with one another. It is also a method for me to provide something of the context that informed his work.

After this introduction, I use the second chapter to draw out certain key ideas and themes in Giussani's writing, and this part of the paper is driven by the scarcity of writing on Giussani. While it is certainly not the case that there has been nothing produced,

⁹⁵ Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010).

there is little enough that it seemed reasonable to establish those points without which a study of his work would make little sense. Particularly, I discuss aspects of the method of liberation that Giussani puts forward, the project that I argue is hindered by his exposition of our constraints.

Following this, in the third chapter I examine his portrayal of those barriers to belief, including attitudes by which religious inquiry is dismissed or nullified, problems inherent to the dominant epistemology, and his particular understanding of idolatry, the formulation of which gives it quite an interesting range of application.

Finally, in chapter four, I discuss the ideas that seem problematic in Giussani's writing. The two that I selected are power and tradition. Of these, power is most frequently referred to in *The Religious Sense* and is certainly less supported. We read of its role as that of a vaguely sinister force that shapes our most foundational concepts and imposes often reductive understandings that serve its own ends, or perhaps those of its wielders, but it is hard to be certain exactly what it is. At times Giussani is speaking explicitly of state power, but at others not, and there really exists little in his work with which to decode the various applications and the processes by which he understands them to unfold.

What makes these issues somewhat surprising is that Giussani is clearly sensitive to the danger of the unreflective use of language. He addresses the way it is always vulnerable to abusive reformulation with very serious consequences, that we are prone to taking on alienating understandings, and that the way we think of a concept can have an enormous impact on our lives and the way we live them. In particular, he stresses these concerns in speaking of freedom and reason, but he seems less alert to the same dangers with regard to power, and to a lesser extent tradition.

Tradition is more defined, and Giussani does present clear ideas as to how it should inform the development of the human person so that he or she may live a good life. However, I argue that a more developed sense of tradition would have allowed a fuller exploration of the threats Giussani perceives. It seems that this could have allowed for a depiction less mysterious than that of disembodied violence. In its place, he could set something more comprehensible which would have greater practical application.

It should be noted that Giussani is attempting to operate outside of reason as it is conventionally understood, and one does need to read his arguments with different expectations in regard to proofs and verification. I question though whether the methods he uses in attempting an expression of the transcendent are as defensible where he wants to outline our more immediate social realities. Maybe they are required in order to break with the problematic forces he is alluding to, but this is not a view he himself adequately presents.

I set out to assess Giussani's resources for what I think could be framed as a Catholic confrontation with liberalism. I found them in some ways to be lacking, and in a manner that has serious consequences whether you frame his project as such or not. That said, I should explain my repeated reference to liberalism here, as it is not how Giussani positions his work. In large part this relates back to the similarities with MacIntyre's position identifying this hegemonic order, and that this analysis of MacIntyre's was something implicit in Giussani's presentation. I believe Giussani would also find liberalism as a tradition to be hopelessly entangled with a sense of reason born of the Enlightenment and thus inherently hostile to his ends. Another important piece here is Giussani's conception of freedom, of liberty, in contrast to its common understandings in the liberal tradition. Though that tradition is far from a homogenous body, a distinction may be made. Aspects of Giussani's sense of freedom correspond with a positive sense of liberty, but for Giussani freedom understood only on a biological basis is empty and even ridiculous. His sense of freedom rests in our given-ness and on the human as being, not acting, in relation to God. Freedom for Giussani is only exercised in recognition of this orientation, of this dependence. This is, in short, the freedom of an ontologically understood self in relation to the transcendent rather than that of the individual as isolated chooser.

Though a critique of liberalism is not the primary purpose of Giussani's project, I believe that its critical element is necessary for its success. Giussani intends in works such as *The Religious Sense* to re-establish the role of Catholics and the Catholic Church within the public culture, and to show the obstructions that culture presents to their beliefs as authentically lived. In so doing he must necessarily focus upon those aspects that make contemporary society such an inhospitable environment for what he presents as authentic religiosity. Tensions or shortcomings in this area of his thought are

then no small matter and represent issues of consequence for his work in its entirety. Where he wants to pose practically applicable suggestions for religious life in this context and to empower his readers to take up a labour of de-alienation, he falls short in his portrayal of those forces which he claims are primarily responsible for that alienating effect. His prescription to his readers, intended to aid in their self-liberation, suffers as a result.

Chapter 2.

A Reason of the Heart

It seems appropriate at this point to present some of Giussani's main ideas. This is in part necessitated by the relatively sparse attention they have received, but it will also provide a context for my own arguments. Topics covered here include Giussani's renovation of the concept of reason, his use of experience, and the idea of the heart. I will also examine his writing style and its consequences.

I will begin this chapter with a brief look at some of the practices within GS, examining them as early expressions of certain central Giussanian ideas. In particular, it is in the common prayer, sporting activities, shared trips, charitable initiatives, and other time spent together away from school and during the holidays that we can see three themes of importance for Giussani, elements that will re-emerge throughout this discussion and should here be established. These themes are the importance of the everyday, the judgement of our experience, and community.

The first of these is expressed in much of the charitable initiatives and the *raggio*, but perhaps best in Giussani's practice of taking students with him on holiday excursions and other such activities outside of the usual hours of teaching. As he writes in *The Risk of Education*, "An education that cannot attract young people in their free time is narrow and inadequate", and "A teenager's authentic personality is more visible in [their] free time...".⁹⁶ I differ with these assessments only to add that they also seem thoroughly

⁹⁶ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Rosanna Frongia (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 76–77.

applicable to all later stages of life. It is in one's free time, the accursed share of the person, to repurpose the language of Georges Bataille, that we most often express our freedom and so generate it; the very term itself indicates this: the time in which you are free. When you feel most expressive of your self, Giussani is saying, that is when you ought also to be clearly expressing your religiosity.

While shared experiences were likely effective in solidifying the students' sustained identification with GS, these practices merit examination not only for degrees of success in indoctrination. We can see in them a move against the aforementioned dualistic view of the religious as set apart from the temporal sphere of life, a position which in Scola's assessment is related to the prevailing "... dualisms human/Christian, nature/the super-natural, faith/reason, and freedom/grace" and was very much a point of contention between Giussani and his followers on the one hand and the Milanese Catholic elite on the other.⁹⁷ "Separating heaven from earth is a crime", Giussani goes so far as to say; "The result has been that the religious sense or religious feeling has become vague and abstracted ...".⁹⁸

In his writing, Giussani evokes the everyday as sacred time and urges us to, as he found necessary in his own life, "... re-evaluate the banality of everyday life" and to ask "What has every single thing (from holidays to mathematics, from falling in love to social commitment) to do with Christ?"^{99, 100} This is not the religiosity of the "Sunday Christian", with the week neatly demarcated into periods of work, of play, and of timing in or out for a shift in the church, with faith as "... a premise that has nothing to do with life."¹⁰¹ It is instead one that is to permeate a life in its entirety. For Giussani, the

⁹⁷ Angelo Scola, "A Style of Thought," trans. Patrick Stevenson, in *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 9.

⁹⁸ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Rosanna Frongia (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 13.

⁹⁹ Notes from an August 1989 talk given by Luigi Giussani, Davide Rondoni, ed., *Communion and Liberation: A Movement in the Church* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 110.

¹⁰⁰ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 6.

¹⁰¹ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Rosanna Frongia (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 12.

importance of the everyday could be tied to the felt need for a Christian presence in the “... more vivacious and concrete environments in which the vast majority of people, including Christians spent their lives”, but can perhaps be better understood as an expression of reality, not only those elements of it most commonly set aside and delineated as spiritual but rather in its entirety, as provocation, as signifying.¹⁰² In an echo of Ratzinger’s remarks on beauty, we find Giussani saying: “Faced with the sea, the earth, the sky, and all things moving within them, I am not impassive—I am animated, moved, and touched by what I see. And this motion is towards a search for something else.”¹⁰³ By this measure, sacred space is vastly expanded beyond the walls of the church and thus also the individual’s time engaged within it. Not the Sunday Christian then, this is not the “weekend human” either. We are not to withdraw our beliefs, judgements, and passions from engagement with the world while, for example, we toil through working life; during this time also we must to our fullest capacity be open to experiencing reality and responding to it.

The experience of reality and the way we judge and verify that experience form our second theme. I will return below to a more extensive discussion of the topic, but I want to introduce it as being crucial to Giussani’s work, particularly in *The Religious Sense*. This text can be read as an invitation to live in awareness and to know, to immerse oneself within reality and thus agree with Giussani’s assessment of it, and there is much that is similar to this in participation within GS and CL. In Giussani’s words, “... only by living something can you go on believing, and therefore understanding and feeling it.”¹⁰⁴ To participate in CL is to accept the invitation of his words and to test, by your own life, his hypothesis. Such an assessment is one of experiential verification: through our own judged experiences, and with reference to what Giussani terms our

¹⁰² Jaca Book, ed., *Il Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione: Conversazione con Robi Ronza* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1987), 19, quoted in Angelo Scola, “A Style of Thought,” trans. Patrick Stevenson, in *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 20.

¹⁰³ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 110.

¹⁰⁴ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 34.

“heart”—the primary drives and evidences he finds in human nature—we are able to evaluate for ourselves the truth of his proposal.

A last theme I will mention here is that of community. In Giussani's writing, it is grounded in scripture, the GS experience—divided in his methodological instruction into the four factors of personal adherence, functionality, authority and visible unity—, and expressed with the words of G.K. Chesterton that “... two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one.”^{105, 106, 107} When, in *Why the Church?*, Giussani asks “If a contemporary of those first [Christian] days, an outsider, had observed the [Christian] fact as it emerged, what elements would he have indicated in describing it?”, it is the characteristic of a visibly identifiable community that he writes of first.^{108, 109}

I am here reminded of NoViolet Bulawayo's words which open her acknowledgements for *We Need New Names*: “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu: A person is a person because of other people.”¹¹⁰ Giussani might respond that this is only partly true in that a person is a person because of being “... constituted by something else

¹⁰⁵ For example, “Woe to the man who is alone” and “if two or three are gathered in my name, my Father will help them, because I am with them.”

Ecclesiastes 4:10 & Matthew 18:20, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 24–25.

¹⁰⁶ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 24–31.

¹⁰⁷ Gilbert K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1988), 88, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 131.

¹⁰⁸ Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 73.

¹⁰⁹ Nikolaus Lobkowicz has reflected on his experiences of friendship as practiced among CL's practitioners and on Giussani's exploration of this virtue in his writing. The latter he finds both surprising and traditional, having been of enormous importance in *The Nicomachean Ethics* but paling in Lobkowicz's judgement throughout the Christian tradition. A further exploration of the topic has been undertaken by Robert Di Pede who makes a brave effort at systematizing a work from a somewhat resistant thinker and inquiring into his theology and the ongoing debates with which it engages, both implicit and explicit. These debates include the problem of preferential or exclusive love and universal love or love of thy neighbour.

Nikolaus Lobkowicz, “Ecumenical by its Nature,” trans. Sheila Beatty, in *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 149–155.

Robert Di Pede, “Luigi Giussani on the Notion of Christian Friendship,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 14, no. 4 (2011): 91–121.

mysterious.”¹¹¹ However, the sense of Bulawayo's thought is not otherwise alien to his emphasis on dependence. For him, this stems first from our “givenness” and God, but also from community as the necessary condition for freedom's affirmation. Giussani makes reference in his writing on community to Alfred Whitehead's definition of religion as “... what the individual does with his own solitariness”, a description he finds interesting but incomplete.¹¹² His response is worth quoting here:

So, if we wanted to complete Whitehead's definition, then yes, religion is, in fact, what the individual does with his own solitariness; but it is also where the human person discovers his essential companionship. Such companionship is, then, more original to us than our solitude. This is true in as much as my structure as question is not generated by my own will; it is given to me. Therefore, before solitude there is companionship, which embraces my solitude. Because of this, solitude is no longer true solitude, but a crying out to that hidden companionship.¹¹³

Moreover, in *Why the Church?* we read that regarding “... the first Christian texts, it certainly cannot be argued that Christianity was lived exclusively as an interior, personal, and intimate interpretation of God, with individualism as its primary feature. On the contrary, the communitarian connotation is foremost.”¹¹⁴ It is interesting to see the degree to which in Giussani's writing the human person is understood as one that basically exists in the company of others. The response to Whitehead is drawn from a work, *The*

¹¹⁰ NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names* (New York: Reagan Arthur Books, 2013), 234.

¹¹¹ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 56.

¹¹² Alfred N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 16, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 56.

¹¹³ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 56–57.

Giussani concludes the point with the poetry of Par Lagerkvist's *Evening Land: Aftonland*: “My friend is a stranger, someone I do not know. / A stranger far, far away. / For his sake my heart is full of disquiet / because he is not with me. / Because, perhaps, after all he does not exist? / Who are you who so fill my heart with your absence? / Who fill the entire world with your absence?”

Par Lagerkvist, *Evening Land: Aftonland*, trans. W.H. Auden & Leif Sjoberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 119, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 56–57.

¹¹⁴ Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 73.

Religious Sense, which proposes a method to the individual by calling upon him or her to look within to the elementary experience. However, this deeply internal work also emphasizes the outward turn and the external dependence of the person. Of course, we can see in his words that this is oriented towards the “hidden companionship” of a transcendent being, and one of a very particular conception, but God is certainly not all that this dependence rests upon. There is a strong emphasis in Giussani’s writing on how we need others to learn from, and also on the outright dangers of being isolated, even when in close proximity, from other human beings.

As a final note to this section, I would add that it seems entirely appropriate for this period of Giussani’s life to have been spent in engagement within the school. Certainly his initial inclination to do so appears to have been provoked by that encounter on the train, and one might make an assessment of religious opportunism on his part, and react with a shrugging “Give me a child until he is seven ...”, though his students were substantially older than that. However, the development of the human person and education’s lifelong role within that development would become a topic of lasting importance fuelling much beyond his book *The Risk of Education*. This is also the interest that lends his treatment of youth the seriousness, perhaps a little unusual in philosophy, that I mentioned earlier.

One of the most striking things about reading Giussani’s *The Religious Sense* is his particular written style, and I want to turn to it now because it is atypical in a contemporary academic context and also because it will lead us nicely into a discussion of his ontology and epistemology. In his study of Giussani and Christian friendship, Di Pede observes that his source material, *Tu*, presents the reader with some difficulties for having been developed dialogically, resulting in certain “... unstable features ...” in the text.^{115, 116} Here, he is perhaps referring to the issue he raises elsewhere, that “... while attempting to render old things in a new way, Giussani treated many different items

¹¹⁵ *Tu* has not yet been published in English translation and is part of a series entitled, in reference to the Martin Luther text, *Quasi Tischreden*.

¹¹⁶ Robert Di Pede, “Luigi Giussani on the Notion of Christian Friendship,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 14, no. 4 (2011): 94.

under the same category, often using the same word for different concepts”¹¹⁷ Di Pede in a related footnote also alludes to the potential difficulties Giussani presents for the systematic reader and this observation does ring true.¹¹⁸ Indeed, Giussani is in many ways not a systematic writer.

What does it mean to say of someone that he or she is not a systematic writer? It is in this case certainly not intended to mean that our subject is without any sort of comprehensive worldview or that the pieces of his thought are inconsistent and cause only confusion when drawn together. There are, however, a few aspects of Giussani's writing that justify Di Pede's assessment.

One of these emerges with his use of the ideas of others, whether philosophers or theologians. He is unconcerned with engaging a thinker in their entirety or their thought as a coherent interlocking system. Instead, he reaches across broad stretches of time and, to a lesser extent, culture, to produce a variety of illustrative fragments from which his own theology is synthesized. Giussani demonstrates a keen awareness of our historically contingent nature, noting at one point that “... in order to interpret history, a text or a speech and the meaning of their words must be evaluated from within the context of the consciousness and mentality prevailing when it was written” and at another that “... every statement must be interpreted in the historical context from which it has arisen and whose views and concerns it expresses. To rip a sentence out of its cultural and literary context and to read it entirely as if it had been written in the present violates basic historical rules and does not allow for its correct understanding.”^{119, 120} He is not, however, driven to retrace the steps of an idea or acknowledge, for example, the Aristotelianism in a sentence. By this latter point I certainly don't mean to accuse him of plagiarism but to say that the historical or genealogical methods are not always how he

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 92.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 115.

This is in reference to Cardinal O'Connor's assessment that “... [Giussani] writes with extraordinary subtlety and in a very compressed fashion” and in *At the Origins of the Christian Claim* “... has outdone himself in density, even in turgidity.”

¹¹⁹ Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Rosanna Frongia (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 17.

¹²⁰ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 15.

proceeds, and that it seems the immediate effect of an idea interests him more than the contours of its development.¹²¹

Giussani's unsystematic use of sources could be termed a painterly, even impressionistic, approach to literature and poetry. Indeed, he is not an engineer or an architect of written words. He doesn't construct arguments with the proofs of a logician; illustration with gestures, anecdotes, and the aforementioned arts is more his rhetorical style. Often, a section of *The Religious Sense* will conclude with the lines of a poem, and sometimes he chooses to say nothing further on the matter, evidently feeling the crucial thought adequately evoked in those lines so that no words of his own would clarify or otherwise improve upon what is already there. Bernard G. Prusak has contended that poetry so used in *The Religious Sense*, as "mere illustration" without interpretation, loses "... the density of life—its complexity and ambiguity—poetry exists to defend."¹²² The point is an interesting one and touches on a prevalent device in Giussani's mode of argument. However, it is not clear that simply placing poetry within the stream of an argument, largely untouched by interpretation or critique but still an interpretive act in itself, is any greater a reduction of the ambiguities that Prusak speaks for than a more explicit act of interpretation would be. Surely the latter approach must, if anything, limit

¹²¹ Sections of *Why the Church?* which deal with the emergence of humanism, naturalism, and rationalism, and their impact upon the contemporary landscape are among the exceptions to this.

¹²² Bernard G. Prusak, "Hard Questions, Soft Answers," *Commonweal* 125, no. 125 (1998): 24–25.

Other failings Prusak identifies include the apparently unsupported assumption on the part of Giussani that authentic religiosity is in fact authentic Christianity with the Church supreme in defining the latter. While Prusak's reading is understandable there is one instance in which Giussani writes of a necessary revolution that "It must be authentically religious, and therefore, with authentic Christians in the front lines." (*RS*, 79) Assuming accuracy of translation here, this does seem to convey Giussani's perception of authentic Christians as participating in a larger group, that of the authentically religious. This is also indicated in *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*: "But the suggestion that we follow the religion of our own tradition remains a basic unpretentious directive. In this sense then, all religions are 'true'. Man's only duty is to be serious in adhering to them." (*OCC*, 20) While he is a vigorous participant within one particular tradition—I would not argue that Giussani views all religions as being in all ways equal—this does seem to indicate a certain regard for authenticity in other religious paths.

Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 79.

Luigi Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1998), 20.

ambiguity. Indeed, while the selective isolation of a passage from its original surroundings can produce distortion, it is difficult to say how Prusak might have a writer better preserve these complexities.

Giussani's approach may frustrate the systematic reader, but it should not be taken for intellectual laziness. Instead, it is very much in keeping with, and an expression of, the philosophical attitudes which I will address below: reality as knowable but also signifying the mysterious transcendent, and human nature as oriented towards that mystery but also fragile and in need of nurturing to fulfill this capacity. John Zucchi has noted that Giussani's style of writing was affected by this subject matter and that he "... often wrote in a stilted Italian because he had such a profound sense of the philosophical weight of words and struggled to use the most adequate language to approximate Mystery."¹²³ It should come as no surprise then that the effort to convey this reality affected his methods and that his epistemology is thus deeply evident in all facets of his work. Those looking for the clarity in proof of a classical logician are bound to be disappointed, for Giussani's style of argument proceeds directly from his particular understanding of reason, reality, and our experience of them. From that understanding emerges a standard for verification that diverges substantially from an Enlightenment conception of reasoned verification in the demands placed upon the reader and writer.

We could begin this next section of our discussion, in which we explore these ideas of reason and of experience, as Giussani does the opening chapter of *The Religious Sense*, with "The First Premise: Realism".¹²⁴ What is meant by this declaration of realism? Giussani's epistemological stance must be understood in light of its historical context and what he sees as the fate of reason, a reason constricted by the Enlightenment's epistemological turn away from a realist ontology. With regard to reason he is thus not attempting invention but recovery, and this can be seen in his demand that in seeking to know something we begin not out of some variant on a Cartesian theme springing from the subject but with the thing itself. Put differently, he argues that reality,

¹²³ John Zucchi, "Translator's Preface" to Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), X.

¹²⁴ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 3.

that which we would know, imposes the method by which we may properly come to know it. To operate reasonably is to be open to this reality, to find correspondence, that of our “heart” with an object of interest, rather than applying our own system of interpretive constructs.

For Giussani, with reference to Alexis Carrel, this is a move against a shrunken reason and ideology in “... an age of ideologies, in which, instead of learning from reality in all its aspects and building on it, man seeks to manipulate reality according to coherent schemes fabricated by the intellect... .”¹²⁵ Such imposition of interpretive constructs upon the object of examination, or its selection, is clearly detrimental to understanding, and Giussani takes seriously Carrel's words that find us now so dominated by ideology that it has come to define us and the climate of our age, our way of thinking and capacity for communication. Against this bleak picture Giussani sets his claim for realism, an openness to reality, for freedom from ideology and from much else besides.

This claim emerges from “... the urgent necessity not to give a more important role to a scheme already in our minds, but rather to cultivate an entire, passionate, insistent ability to observe the real event, the fact.”¹²⁶ How else to know reality but to be present in it, with agency, to live and to make a strong commitment to it? We are to put aside for the moment the teachings of the canonical philosophers, the words of artists, teachers, politicians, journalists, and popular images and trends of opinion. In short, we are not to accept a reality that has been transmitted to us by authority. We are to exercise rationality by proceeding according to the method required by the object of interest, and where this object pertains to humanity we should examine ourselves and our experience. It is only after this that we should bring our observations into dialogue with those of others, including the authorities we had set aside, enlivening our assessments by tension, affirmation, or further provocations. Without that first step of inquiry on our part, the opinion we form will be an alienating one that originates from outside ourselves and is imposed upon our experience, framing the picture unnaturally before we might properly understand its dimensions.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 3.

In some ways this schema seems simplistic and perhaps better suited for t-shirt slogans: Think for Yourself... Question Authority. Giussani himself acknowledges at one point how banal his suggestions may seem.¹²⁷ However, the ease with which we might be tempted to indifference reflects more an exhaustion of the language around freedom, its abusive and frequent misapplication in popular culture, marketing, and politics, than it does the seriousness of Giussani's challenge. In its implications, and in its rather weighty demands upon us, this intervention deserves our attention.

How do we know? How do we carry out our verification? How do we arrive at a correspondence with reality? The answers for Giussani revolve around a "... criterion for judging ... from within the inherent structure of the human being... ." ¹²⁸ This criterion upon which so much depends is the elementary experience of the human person, the "... complex of original needs and evidences ..." that Giussani locates as universal to all of humanity and terms "the heart".¹²⁹ On this topic, Giussani will not satisfy all readers. Though Prusak does not address the heart, the title of his review of *The Religious Sense*, "Hard Questions, Soft Answers", in which he finds Giussani's work to be long on uninterpreted poetry and short on substance, might speak for many here.¹³⁰ Giussani's answer on this issue may indeed be considered "soft", though perhaps that is by necessity when we consider his intent to connect the human person to a transcendent reality; it is a link that cannot, Giussani argues, be made with reason alone.

Giussani attempts to bring together reality with something natural to the human person's perception, natural but, as we shall see, all too easily obscured. The religious sense is for Giussani a manifestation of our nature and inherent to us all regardless of our place and time of birth. It is that aspect of the heart, of what he terms our elementary experience, that extends itself in Augustinian desire towards questions of ultimate meaning and purpose, questions as to why and how we are here and where we are

¹²⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 31.

¹²⁸ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 7.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁰ Bernard G. Prusak, "Hard Questions, Soft Answers," *Commonweal* 125, no. 125 (1998): 24–25.

going, and questions about God. In this, the telos of Giussani's writing is revealed, for without the hindrance of all that confuses our hearts, those attitudes that I will discuss further in Chapter 3, we are in his eyes people of destiny. We are drawn to following this reality's signs, and in following them we are drawn beyond the reach of our reason. We are drawn towards mystery, to transcendence, to God. We are so drawn, but we must learn anew how to follow those signs, how to take meaning from our experience of them. Doing so requires an examination of how we know, of how we encounter reality.

The issue at hand is introduced in *The Religious Sense* by the third in an imagined series of teachers addressing a philosophy class:

We all have the impression that this [notebook] is an object outside ourselves. This evidence is primary, original. But if I did not know it? It is as if it did not exist. You see, therefore, that knowledge is the encounter between human energy and a presence. It is an event where the energy of human knowledge is assimilated to the object. How do you produce such an assimilation? This is a fascinating question that we can only partially answer. We are certain, however, that knowledge is composed of two factors.¹³¹

At first glance, Giussani's own partial answer is disarmingly simple in its teleological thinking. We are as human beings imbued by nature with a heart, an array of needs or drives such as those for happiness, truth, justice, etc., drives which can be distorted or obscured by the forces of our social environment. These form the "... spark igniting the human motor ...", the fount of its dynamism on which all personal affirmation may be based.¹³² Where this connects with our apprehension of the notebook is grasped easily enough. Our interest piqued—"what is that shape in my vision?"—our eyes or other instruments of sensation are driven to take the object and hold it against our judgement. Yes, we can then affirm: I have held and beheld objects such as this before, and it is indeed a notebook.

This is all very simple, maybe too much so, but even this explanation conceals a provocation, perhaps a contentious one in the present climate, that Giussani expands to

¹³¹ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 8.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 7.

make a crucial aspect of his epistemology explicit. In our example we take the notebook into our awareness because of a felt interest, and we are similarly driven when engaging with more consequential objects and ideas. In this view, there is no disinterested shift in the gaze, of the eyes or the mind, no action unattached to some good, however small.¹³³ Against the ideal of disinterested rationalism, an objectivity that denies the place of the affective self alongside the cognitive or finds it wanting in the extreme, he conceives reason more generously so as to include the aforementioned “heart”.¹³⁴ It is with reason that he calls on the reader to engage reality, but it is a reason that also encompasses the human emotions as set against the “... ideal of imperturbability, even when reached through an implacable mastery of the self ...” that “... besides being inadequate and illusory ... is also at the mercy of chance.”¹³⁵

Emotion, an aspect of the reasonable appreciation of reality, is not to be denied, for to do so is a diminishment of the human being that narrows our vision and rejects much of the human experience. Our emotions too are by this reading crucial manifestations of the heart, and they are redeemed as essential criteria for assessing experience. To reject their role in this is not to sweep aside a veil before our eyes but to gouge one of them out. Such is the violent self-harm that Giussani perceives in the

¹³³ I find a position sympathetic to aspects of Giussani's in Paul Davies' introduction to theoretical physicist Richard Feynman's *Six Easy Pieces*:

“There is a popular misconception that science is an impersonal, dispassionate, and thoroughly objective enterprise. Whereas most other human activities are dominated by fashions, fads, and personalities, science is supposed to be constrained by agreed rules of procedure and rigorous tests. It is the results that count, not the people who produce them. This is, of course, manifest nonsense. Science is a people-driven activity like all human endeavor, and just as subject to fashion and whim. In this case fashion is set not so much by choice of subject matter, but by the way scientists think about the world.”

Paul Davies “Introduction” to Richard Feynman *Six Easy Pieces: Essentials of Physics Explained by its Most Brilliant Teacher* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), ix.

¹³⁴ One response to Giussani's writing on the topic has been that of Robert Di Pede who has hypothesized an implicit aim in *Tu's* handling of friendship as “... a modern attempt to repair the erroneous tendency in the Christian tradition to regard with suspicion the body, the emotions, and affection.”

Robert Di Pede, “Luigi Giussani on the Notion of Christian Friendship,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 14, no. 4 (2011): 93–94.

¹³⁵ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 68.

currently prevailing attitudes regarding reason and feeling, emotion, and how we come to know.

Reason is not to be reduced to logic or demonstrability alone. Rather, it is the appropriate state of openness to reality, a “reasonableness” before it. Is it not reasonable, he asks, to accept one’s mother’s love as a truth corresponding to reality? And if the reason of your understanding does not allow you to answer yes, then shouldn’t it be enlarged to allow it, and you, a fuller affirmation of reality? Here we see emotion bound to our perception, not as a fog obscuring thoughts and senses when left unmastered, but as an integral aspect of human understanding. As an affective, and effective, agent within the world, it is our original needs, drives, and desires that allow for an encounter that elicits meaning and comprehension. Giussani’s presentation is not a neo-Romanticist’s one which privileges emotion over reason. Instead emotion is bound up with reason, not as a rationality-distorting malignant growth, but as an integral drive in the processes of knowing, without acknowledgement of which our apprehension will be flawed and incomplete. Though Giussani finds a crucial place for human emotion, this is neither a romantic emotivism nor is it the sort of Protestant subjectivism which he has written of and set apart from his own “Orthodox-Catholic view”.¹³⁶

Giussani’s recasting of reason also lays a path to joining it, rejoining he would say, with faith, and renders reasonable openness the appropriate stance before reality’s provocation. Such matters as our recognition and reading of reality’s signs can then fall again within the ambit of general culture and social discourse; they are reconnected with the language of this world and may be numbered among its concerns and so discussed. By this I mean that with his mending of the rifts between reason, emotion, and faith, Giussani has made a reintroduction that returns religious questions to the realm of public reason and discourse.

The entire treatment of the matter by Giussani might be viewed as a long delayed response to the student in his first class who, before Giussani could even begin to teach, had raised his hand and said “... it is useless for you to come here and speak to

¹³⁶ Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 17–23.

us about faith, to reason about faith, because reason and faith represent two wholly different worlds... to reason about faith is to engage in a mystification.”^{137, 138} Statements such as this one highlight the attitudes Giussani understands to be obstructing our reasonable engagement with reality, and particularly our religious sense. His expansive sense of reason is crucial in dismissing as unreasonable such reductive positions before the world, and it informed his response to that student. Though I have not been to America, I’m sure that it exists, he said to the class’s professor. “Do you find my certainty reasonable?”¹³⁹ Faith, which means for Giussani belief in the words of another, is not so far removed from reason, or the reasonable, as the student of his anecdote would have it.

The epistemological burden, according to Giussani, is as follows: “... this is the moral rule: *Love the truth of an object more than your attachment to the opinions you have already formed about it.* [Giussani's italics] More concisely, one could say, ‘love the truth more than yourself.’”¹⁴⁰ Such rigour is necessary because of the forces by which our intellectual environment is shaped. The dominant culture as “... supreme instrument of power ...” acts by “... quasi osmosis or by a more explicit violence ...” upon our consciousness so that “... we are inclined to remain bound to the opinions we already have about the *meaning* of things and to attempt to justify our attachment to them.”¹⁴¹ Breaking with these prevailing narratives, overt or otherwise, requires the exacting commitment of his “moral rule”, and it is an allegiance to truth that few are likely to measure up to. Implied by this deficiency is the human person as bearer of alienated experiences, the carrier of externally produced meanings and memories, and semi-passive receiver and transmitter of an imposed mythos. To state that we receive meaning from without should not, in itself, be cause for great surprise. Giussani’s

¹³⁷ In another telling of the story he, even years later, recalls the particular student's name.

Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Rosanna Frongia (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 15.

¹³⁸ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 15.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 16

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 31.

particular claim is that this is dominating us, and it is most crucially harmful to certain religious forms of life; however, one can live one's way out of these confines.

In discussing Giussani's depiction of these impositions upon our freedom, it would be useful to establish what he understands freedom to be, for it differs from its common conceptions within liberal tradition. This is not the liberty of the isolated choice-maker but that of one in ontological relationality with God through Christ, and thus with all others; it is a liberty in the recognition of this asymmetric relation to the transcendent. In practical terms, it is also that state which allows us to find correspondence between our heart and reality, and to follow the signs, the beauty, we see there, without falling victim to the distortions that Giussani argues pervade our lives.

When reading Giussani on ideology and its dangers, it is important not to misunderstand him to be presenting the ideal of human experience as springing forth from a kind of tabula rasa. Living in such a way would be comparable in his eyes to a ship stricken and without means of impetus. Though their methods and styles are highly divergent, there is a recognition in Giussani's work of something like Charles Taylor's background understanding. We all take on cargo, some of it useful but much in his estimation not, from a variety of sources in our surrounding social environment, from family, school, the workplace, etc. Giussani does have a notion of essential human nature, but he understands the importance of both socio-historical contingency and this cargo of which our background understandings are formed. The latter requires treatment similar to that of the transmissions of authority: in a sustained lifelong practice we are to reflect repeatedly upon it, holding it up against our elementary experience for verification. It is in this way that we craft for ourselves a useful tool of our baggage so that right action, unobscured comprehension of reality and appropriate response to it, comes more easily to us. This quest becomes in Giussani's language a great labour, an *ascesis*, to form the habits of a life true to its ontological content.¹⁴²

Crucial to Giussani's writing on realism is the notion of verification by experience. How do we know reality, assess the contents of our traditions, of acquired knowledge by way of authority, of our beliefs? The answer is that we must experience. "Even the

¹⁴² Ibid., 11.

clearest evidence will not become a conviction unless one becomes familiar with it, unless one opens one's self to it attentively and patiently, unless one gives it time and lives with it, in short, unless one loves it.”¹⁴³ Experience here is meant in a particularly full and active sense that is beyond merely passing through life, idly sampling. One might, and a great many in this sense do, live what could otherwise be termed a thoroughly rich and abundant life, trying this and that, living as a collector of things, immaterial and otherwise, while experiencing little or nothing. According to Giussani, such an accumulation of “facts and sensations” can even be damaging, an emptying of the person, if the further step of judgment and evaluation is not taken.¹⁴⁴ “Judge not...” this is not, for “experience” without evaluation, without coming to an understanding of meaning, is not experience at all. It should be emphasized that this experience is very much one of active engagement with the world around us and not purely an internal matter.

There are many topics with which one might engage with experience so understood—travel for example—but here Giussani has a great deal to offer the contemporary reader on a point that has grown in relevance with technological development. More present and pressing a concern than tourism in most people's daily lives is our reception of information in the current and presumably ongoing era of technology-enabled inter-connectivity and information-gluttony. Sitting at the computer in the morning, or picking up the phone from the bedside table, can produce a rush of divergent images, opinions, facts, and stories: snippets of events in Syria or Ukraine can mingle with quotations drawn from national politics, comedic memes with decontextualized words of inspiration, photos of a Tokyo bar or a São Paulo favela with those of friends' babies or previous nights' dinner plates. In light of this fragmented perspective, often entirely lacking in immediate personal connection, the questions of how we experience, and how we ought to experience, how we evaluate and understand, are well worth asking, and Giussani's is a fascinating voice in that conversation.

¹⁴³ “The Perception of Mystery in the Encounter with that Man,” Notes from a talk between Luigi Giussani and a group of Memores Domini novices. Milan, December 19th, 1998. Accessed at www.traces-cl.com .

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

Giussani's account of reality, and the qualities of the human agent within it, will not persuade everyone. Given his reassessment of reason itself, this is hardly surprising. Any appraisal of Giussani's arguments that is developed without his distinctive sense of reason is perhaps unlikely to find them convincing. His is a proposed methodology that draws upon mysticism, an approach that is difficult to critique and easy to discount. One useful statement on method here is from Bernhard Welte on *Why the Church?*'s concluding page:

One cannot be forced to see that this turning point of experience is possible. It is certainly possible at any time but at no time is it necessary. Furthermore, it cannot be produced by any method rationally devised to pursue the target. It is possible to shed light on it, as we have tried to do. It is possible to cite testimonies in favour of it, as we have also done. But there is no obligation inherent in those testimonies. All they do is attract our attention. And the steps we may take to reach some kind of clarification are just pointers to an experience that we may but do not necessarily have to live.¹⁴⁵

Giussani's inclusion of this quotation is appropriate, for it justifies his approach nicely. It is particularly relevant in evaluating *The Religious Sense*, where the question of just how we are to assess its claims is brought to the fore.

Schindler has remarked on some of these issues, addressing the challenges of demonstrability and proof when reading *The Religious Sense*.¹⁴⁶ Dealing with the problematic nature of proof and inquiry in Giussani's conception of reason, he finds the writer's "distinctive genius", one which resists abstract resolutions: "There are rational arguments, to be sure. But it is crucial to see that these arguments can be rightly posed *only dramatically* [Schindler's emphasis]: only by giving myself over to the dramatic 'logic'—or better, 'onto-logic'—of life."¹⁴⁷ The proof of this particular pudding is in the eating and is not reached in the abstract or through disinterested rationality. While Giussani clearly has his own certainties about the nature of things, he does not deploy

¹⁴⁵ Bernhard Welte, *Das Licht des Nichts* (Dusseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1980), 15, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 234.

¹⁴⁶ David Schindler, "Luigi Giussani on the 'Religious Sense' and the Cultural Situation of Our Time," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 1 (1998): 141–150.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

the language of hypothesis accidentally regarding this reality and its signs.¹⁴⁸ “Dramatic” entrance into these arguments entails nothing less than to live them and then act upon our evaluation.

This is not, as Marc Ouellet has pointed out, a philosophy of theological esoterica built upon the mastery of particular knowledge.¹⁴⁹ Nor, however, is it any less demanding. A full immersion into, and assessment of, Giussani's arguments and ideas requires a commitment beyond the normal thresholds of scholarly exploration, one by which the inquirer must invest his or her own life and intentions into the matter and not only time and thought. *The Religious Sense's* invitation is an open one in that it does not necessarily require academic credentials to proceed on its path, but fully entering Giussani's arguments does seem to require that you actually step onto that path yourself. Something of this can be seen in *The Journey to Truth is an Experience* where Giussani writes of the necessarily continuous nature of commitment that it demands something quite beyond “try it and see” experimentation. Indeed, he writes, “We cannot say: ‘I’ll try a number of times, and then if I am unable and I don’t like it, that’s it!’ Such an attitude reveals at its origins a subtle lack of love for the Truth... .”¹⁵⁰ A much fuller dedication is apparently needed.

This does raise questions of legitimacy regarding non-immersive studies of Giussani's texts, but this is not to say that one cannot write about texts such as *The Religious Sense* save from within its practice. I mean here only to draw out some of the difficulties that emerge from his rethinking of reason and to convey that there are areas in his writing that require an experiential assessment to know their full merits. However, there is much of his work which we can respond to in this setting, taking up for examination his arguments and their implications without entering into them fully as lived evaluations.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 147.

¹⁴⁹ Marc Ouellet, “An Extraordinary Educator,” in *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 73.

¹⁵⁰ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 16.

We have thus far covered a little of Giussani's narrative, the somewhat Bhudda-like origin story of a course-altering encounter when out in the world and the work it inspired. I have held up for examination the categories of reason, experience, and ideology. Also covered were his sense of reality and, perhaps of greatest importance, the peculiarly Giussanian human nature emerging from his notion of the heart that facilitates his picture of a proper attitude before it. Giussani's image of the human person is a powerful one, of a fullness of human life and the means required to realize that telos, but as we shall see, he finds that fullness to be critically obstructed in our present situation. These are the ideas that drove not only his actions in life but also his very mode of communication, his style of writing embodying his understanding of knowledge, its acquisition, and its verification.

All of this is combined with a deep scepticism as to the ends most often pursued in present-day society, including those which are regularly presented as running in rebellious opposition to more normative attitudes. Crucial to his discussion of the individual's liberation and fulfillment of his or her human destiny is his critique of contemporary society and the barriers it contains for those who might endeavour to attempt it. However, the depiction he offers of this society and these forces is not always satisfactory when held against the aim of empowerment, for such a goal and the standard of practical applicability surely require that the reader might understand both what it is they are breaking free from and the forces arrayed against their success. In the following chapters I will turn to these forces and to the individual's experience of their violence so that the resources which Giussani applies may be read against the ends he seeks.

Chapter 3.

“... into the violence of his environment.”¹⁵¹

Having returned to the front row of desks, I picked up from one of the students the first book that caught my eye. It was one of his textbooks, *Compendium of the History of Italian Literature* by Natalino Sapegno. I began thumbing through it to pass the time, and my eye simply happened to fall upon the page where the author described the life of [Giacomo] Leopardi. At this point, I began to read with interest, but after about half a minute I exclaimed: “Class! Stop the exam! Now you, with all of your presumptions, with all of your desire for autonomy, you read these things and accept them without question, as if you were just drinking a glass of water?”¹⁵²

I include this anecdote here for a number of reasons. In part, it is because I find it to be rather charming. When describing Giussani, it is this episode from his time at the liceo that comes most readily to my mind with its image of a teacher moved to such an outburst in flipping idly through a student's textbook. The passage also demonstrates how seriously its central character took life in its every moment and especially so where the education of young people was concerned; he found it absolutely unthinkable to remain silent, even during an exam he was administering, having seen what they were being taught and their passivity towards it. More particular to our present concerns, the full story is introduced as “... the very moment when [Giussani] discovered this position

¹⁵¹ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 38.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 60.

as a systematic attitude.”¹⁵³ “This position” is really a whole range of attitudes by which the questions he deems most important to humanity are dismissed, often rejected *a priori* as irrelevant. In this case, Sapegno identifies inquiries such as “What is life? What is the use of it? What is the purpose of the universe? And why is there pain?” as “... those questions from which the true, adult philosopher distances himself, seeing them as absurd and lacking in any authentic speculative value”¹⁵⁴ He then locates these questions as the exclusive domain of Leopardi's philosophy and finds them to be deficient in seriousness and in maturity.

In the preceding chapter, I alluded to the difficulties presented by the social context into which an individual is flung. The challenges posed by his or her milieu and its “systematic attitude” are a source of pressing anxiety that permeates *The Religious Sense*, and I shall here begin with a discussion of Giussani's treatment of that environment. It is the setting through which he understands both his efforts at a Catholic cultural reengagement and the threats he perceives against their success. It frames his understanding of tradition, of power, and of the individual's liberation, and in our examination of it we will be better equipped to assess the resources of his critique. With this in mind, I turn now to the forces which Giussani argues beset us.

These “forces” form an area in Giussani's writing that is especially open to accusations of being highly dramatic but, particularly in *The Religious Sense*, lacking in the detail appropriate to consideration of such an important topic. Here again, the difficulties in Giussani's particular epistemological stance are striking, as is the accompanying question of how we as readers ought to respond to it. How should we be convinced of its veracity? Schindler reminds us that *The Religious Sense's* argument is one that can only fully be evaluated dramatically, and this does perhaps diminish the burden of academic rigour upon Giussani's arguments.¹⁵⁵ However, Giussani's poetic expressions are much more understandable as the necessary mode of communication

¹⁵³ Ibid., 60.

¹⁵⁴ Natalino Sapegno, *Compendio di Storia Della Letteratura Italiana*, vol. 3 (Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1956), 240, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 60.

¹⁵⁵ David Schindler, “Luigi Giussani on the ‘Religious Sense’ and the Cultural Situation of Our Time,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 1 (1998): 141–150.

when it is a shared sense of the transcendent, of mystery with a capital M, or a corresponding ontology of the human person that we are seeking. It is where his gaze turns to contemporary social forces that this approach becomes a more questionable one. Might we expect more conventional argumentative constructions rather than lyrical depiction where our immediate surroundings are at issue? What results from the decision, both stylistically and philosophically substantial, to retain the latter? Is it the case that a more conventionally constructed argument could not sufficiently break with the powerful social currents which he depicts? These are some of the questions that emerge before one even delves into Giussani's arguments.

Here in the treatment of our social environment, "... the violence of [the individual's] surroundings...", Giussani's dramatics approach their apex.¹⁵⁶ We read in *The Religious Sense* of the "... mentality that dominates us and touches us at every point ...", and of the stifling "... clamour and obtuseness of our social life... ." ¹⁵⁷ In our inescapable social context, we are moved within a mist formed by the expressions of power, near all-pervasive and reinforced by ideology. This is theatrical language, but then, as we have seen, efforts at imperturbability which seek to ensconce the individual in emotional aridity are not at all agreeable to Giussani. He finds them inhuman and detrimental to a reasonable engagement with reality.

Giussani argues that unfortified in this world, without the tools of one's tradition and an authentic sense of self and the heart, the individual is all too likely to be borne about by these forces with little impetus to alter direction. Having neither the strength nor the inclination to resist tides whose effects or perhaps even existence may be scarcely apparent, this person is thus at the mercy of the common mentality of the social bodies he or she enters. These include immediate family, schools, workplaces, and others. Each of these sub-societies must contain its own characteristic, semi-distinctive, and sometimes hyper-local sets of normative processes, yet Giussani seems comfortable in indentifying with society on a broader level—it is difficult to say precisely how universally—certain meta-narratives, ideas and attitudes that permeate society and

¹⁵⁶ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 38.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11 & 46.

ourselves. Not only of the external environment, he warns in the opening chapter of *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, they settle into our core and become foundational for our background understanding, integrated within our persons as aspects of that framework through which we receive and comprehend all else.¹⁵⁸ What are these near-omni-pervasive prejudices? One incomplete answer would be that they are those which run counter to the Catholic Christianity of his beliefs. They do so by creating an unsuitable environment for its ideas to take hold, a barren soil in which it can no longer be seen as a live option for many, even among those who self-identify as “Catholic”.¹⁵⁹

What generates such an inhospitable environment? In answering this question, we can look to certain obstacles which he outlines, impediments which are prevalent in contemporary society and obstruct what we ought to, as humans, otherwise naturally be able to achieve.¹⁶⁰ Obscuring what we are structurally capable of approaching, these attitudes coalesce to form a social reality that is, unlike the relative religious unity of life which Giussani perceives in medieval Europe, inadequate as a point of departure for religious inquiry.¹⁶¹ By examining these harmful impositions, we can gain a clearer picture of the social environment and its violence upon the human person. To this end I will primarily be drawing upon two texts: *The Religious Sense* and *Why the Church?*.

Of these, *The Religious Sense* serves as a fair point of departure with its middle sections devoted entirely to the positions that Giussani argues diminish the human person, specifically in his or her capacity, or willingness, to seriously pose questions regarding religion and any conception of an ultimate reality.¹⁶² The reader will not find the statistical support of a social scientist's work here. These are observations being

¹⁵⁸ Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 13.

¹⁵⁹ As we saw in the first chapter, Giussani perceived in mid-century Italian religiosity that the unreflective gesture of self-identification is not always indicative of any great health or strength of belief, nor does it necessarily demonstrate a community of belief that will successfully transmit into the future with successive generational reinvestment into, and dialogue with, that body of ideas.

¹⁶⁰ Luigi Giussani, “Religious Awareness in Modern Man,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 1 (1998): 112.

¹⁶¹ Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 33.

made of common and influential modes of life, presented by way of what Giussani finds to be characteristic, in some cases one might say exemplary, expressions of the type. In these expressions, readers shall either find something familiar, corresponding with personal experience, or they shall not, and there is little effort made on Giussani's part, quoted assertions and examples aside, to sway the reader in his direction. I suppose one's immediate response ought to be to judge the depiction, in its broad strokes, as convincing or not. My own assessment would be that he is at least in part successful, for as a cataloguing of dominant attitudes the chapters do constitute an effective snapshot of a series of recognizable positions.

Each position takes the form of a limitation upon our horizon that moves inwards the lines which delineate our outermost limitations. One example would be Sapegno's dismissal of "the big questions" as being juvenile and not to be seriously considered by any right-thinking and rational adult. Entire areas of exploration are placed by these positions beyond the conceived realm of possibility, in Giussani's view an act that falls short of reasonableness in that it fails to fulfill this capacity for awareness of reality. We find in these chapters the dissolution of the individual's aspirations into the life of the state, into a notion of progress, or otherwise into the future via utopian and other social projects. Whether Marxist, scientific, or of some other framing vision, these determinative hypotheses regarding society's evolution alienate in their denial of human fulfillment in the personal sphere.¹⁶³ Further, they place that future, and by extension the present, squarely in the hands of those who wield power and are in the position to make it an expression of the force which they exert.

A kind of wilful auto-anaesthetization is also included in this section, the move by which the individual seeks to become imperturbable by what is felt to be, after all, unanswerable. He or she may then go on untroubled by questions for which no conclusion is to be found. This again is a diminishment of our reason, a wilful drying up

¹⁶² Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 59–93.

¹⁶³ Amusingly, these calls to toil in this life for fruits never to be personally enjoyed carry some resemblance to the way religious attitudes towards the afterlife are commonly depicted among sceptics: suffering now in pursuit of promised rewards in a fictional land. Transcendence of one kind is here replaced by quite another.

of the person's most comprehensive possibilities; he or she is hardened against the world, but at what cost? For Giussani it is an empty gesture of strength, stones hurled into a strong wind, and at too high a price: less vulnerable perhaps to our immediate circumstances we render ourselves insensitive to transcendent possibility.¹⁶⁴

Other obstructionist stances offered include the aesthetic evasion in which the depth and breadth of human experience is subsumed within that of natural beauty and our drive towards the transcendent redirected to a more comprehensible focus such as a sunset across the mountains. Another example is the suspicion that we are only manifestations of a meaningless contingent reality. The sudden horror of this is depicted in the poetry of Eugenio Montale:

Perhaps some morning, walking a vitreous, clear
air, turning I shall see the miracle appear,
the nothingness around my shoulders and the void
behind, and know the terror of the drunken paranoid.

Then suddenly, as on a screen, confusion
of hills, and houses, planted in the usual illusion.
But it will be too late, and I shall be warier
as I move among those men who do not turn, with my
secret terror.¹⁶⁵

In each of the above we find examples of common attitudes that prevent the kind of inquiry which the religious sense entails. They inform the prevailing background understandings that prevent Giussani's conception of authentic religiosity, particularly authentic Catholicism, from appearing to be a live option.

¹⁶⁴ This position alone, to offer some sense of the breadth of Giussani's synthetic illustration, is conveyed through Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *Tempest*, Kazimierz Brandys' excellent "The Defense of Granada", the language of the Beat writers, Yevtushenko's poetry, Hemmingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Italian columnist Augusto Guerriero, and finally Thomas Mann's "Little Herr Friedmann"

Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 64–69.

¹⁶⁵ Eugenio Montale, "Perhaps Some Morning . . .," in *Provisional Conclusions*, trans. Edith Farnsworth (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1970), 40, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 74.

Some of the positions offered by Giussani are likely not widely represented within the general population of human beings, stumbling through their daily lives as best they can. Though the attitudes of a Bertrand Russell or Denis Diderot may come to achieve a broader foothold and represent a common recognizable position, most of us do not face reality in such a manner. There are, however, others here that do seem to capture a strong sense of the attitudes that frame our worlds, and not just those of certain remarkable figures. “The voluntaristic substitution of [religious] questions” in favour of a thorough investment of the self into social causes strikes me as a successful portrayal of this sort.¹⁶⁶ It is one that avoids the trap of identifying those most prevalent thought structures entirely by way of somewhat extraordinary figures. Another apt portrayal is that of the practical denial with which Augusto Guerriero, in response to a man sick with tuberculosis and seeking serenity, gives voice to something rarely publicly expressed:

I only write about politics and what use would it be to write to you about politics: You need for someone to talk to you about other things, and I never write about those things, in fact I never think about them, and it is precisely not to think about them that I write about politics and about other things that, in the end, don't mean a thing to me. In this way I manage to forget myself and my misery. This is the problem: to find the way to forget ourselves and our own misery.¹⁶⁷

This evokes the rejection that occurs, perhaps unthinkingly, when the questions which Giussani is concerned with are shrugged off as being too heavy a load, too difficult, discordant, or painful to grapple with. Life then is lived so as not to allow them again to register in the consciousness, unless some great disturbance forces itself upon the person.

These are some of the attitudes which Giussani presents as diminishing our capacity for reasonable engagement, especially with questions pertaining to authentic religion and transcendent reality. Something of their power in doing this can be seen in his discussion of preconception and ideology. Preconception itself is not entirely avoidable, and were one able to achieve it, such an unprejudiced state may be quite

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁶⁷ Augusto Guerriero, “Italy Asks,” in *Epoca*, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 68.

undesirable; it may be one of confusion, horror, or perhaps wonder at waking each and every morning. Giussani approaches preconception in assessment of an all-encompassing materialistic prejudice, a deterministic thought structure, and the social forces that bolster it. “I can't explain it, Socrates, but I do think you're making your points well”, he recalls Callicles saying in Plato's *Gorgias*. “All the same, I'm feeling what people invariably feel with you: I'm not entirely convinced”; “It's the demotic love [attachment to the common mentality of the populace *[interpolation as appears in The Religious Sense]*] residing in your heart which is resisting me, Callicles”, runs Socrates' reply.¹⁶⁸ In Callicles' position we see reason surrendered in the face of the day's dominant attitudes, the former relinquished all too readily where it may offer a challenge to the latter. Similarly, Giussani sees a “demotic love” carrying the day for certain memetic complexes, producing attitudes which are inhospitable to the religious sense such as a heightened receptivity for claims couched in scientific language.¹⁶⁹ The capacity for reasonable awareness of reality is displaced by the rationalization of the crowd and the forces that sway it.

Ideology, a mortar to the bricks of these norms, is a well-worn and often ill-used word, but I will here include Giussani's definition: “... it is a theoretical-practical construction based upon an *aspect* of reality—even a true aspect—which is formulated for the aims of a philosophy or political project, is taken unilaterally and made, in principle, into an absolute.”¹⁷⁰ Much of its danger can be seen to lie in that line of connection with reality, the morsel of truth which it may at times carry and so elicit our acquiescence to the whole of its totalizing force. This can occur in an act of abstraction from the particular, such as in Giussani's example of the move from a particular impoverished individual as a human person to theorization regarding “the poor”.¹⁷¹ The human person at issue is banished from the picture, used and then discarded as an

¹⁶⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 114, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 95.

¹⁶⁹ I shall return to this point below as it would be incorrect to understand Giussani's to be an entirely, or merely, anti-scientific position.

¹⁷⁰ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 95.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

externality no longer of practical consequence. Such abusive constructions that can be convenient to the purposes of the powerful enter into the common mentality and come to dominate as features of our background understandings, preconceived forms impeding an appropriate stance before reality.

Giussani attributes the processes by which this dominance occurs rather loosely to the avenues of "... mass-media, schools, and propaganda", and the powerful themselves are unsatisfactorily identified as those who through "... a certain shrewdness for the political life or the use of an inheritance" are able to wilfully impact their world.¹⁷² It is vagaries of this sort that do little to convince the reader that Giussani himself has moved beyond unreflective abstraction in his own critique. There is no great abundance of argument or analysis provided, and again one is left to make one's own assessment with little reason or supporting argument offered as to why we ought to agree. He does not provide his own thoughts on the matter here, but he does include those of a pair of other sources: Pierre Lecomte du Nouy's *L'Avenir de l'esprit* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*.

The passage from *L'Avenir de l'esprit* rails against attacks on the concept of God as "... cowardly and unscientific work ..." brought about by "... the evil spirit of the bad shepherds" which the writer sets himself against.¹⁷³ Giussani cites this as part of a substantial body of documentation showing a long advancing systematic materialistic prejudice that rejects authentic religiosity. It is a goal which, all questions of accuracy aside, would have been better served by demonstrating manifestations of that advance rather than a response to it. Perhaps more interesting is his turn to Solzhenitsyn who evokes, in *Cancer Ward*, Francis Bacon's "idols of the tribe" and "idols of the cave".¹⁷⁴ These idols are the prejudices that often contaminate experience and are echoed in Solzhenitsyn's "... idols of the theatre ... the authoritative opinions of others

¹⁷² Ibid., 78 & 95.

¹⁷³ Pierre Lecomte du Nouy, *L'avenir de l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 96.

¹⁷⁴ Aleksander I. Solzhenitsyn, *Cancer Ward*, trans. Nicholas Bethell & David Burg (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), 435–436, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 96–97.

which a man likes to accept as a guide when interpreting something he hasn't experienced himself."¹⁷⁵ Put in this way, the depiction does not include the problem of too easily accepting authoritative opinions regarding something one has already experienced, and this seems to me the more troubling of the two.

Something of the sort is described by Solzhenitsyn as the "idols of the market place ... the errors which result from the communication and association of men with each other. They are the errors a man commits because it has become customary to use certain phrases and formulas which do violence to reason."¹⁷⁶ With this, Solzhenitsyn is really expressing some central aspects of the problems Giussani seeks to address: the power of an error held in common, the impact of cliché, the way our very terms and formulations of communication become chains upon perception. Each of these points is well taken, but they do not entirely satisfy Giussani's introductory promise. In briefly transitioning into the *Cancer Ward* passage he states that the author "... analytically details the various mechanisms of man's alienating dependence upon the *de facto* [Giussani's italics] dominant theology."¹⁷⁷ Fulfilling that task would require more than is provided, and with it left undone, we carry forward a rather indistinct sketch to hold up against our experience.

Again, it can be argued that Giussani's attempt to break with an Enlightenment conception of reason entails a different procedure than we might otherwise expect from a writer seeking to show us the world as he sees it. This is an argument for another paper, but it is one that does appear to have some merit. It is also relevant to note that his strength is very much in beginning from experience and looking first to felt effect upon the human individual rather than to sociological mechanics. However, he leaves a void in his lack of engagement with the processes of power, and given the importance he attributes to power's role in defining our stance before reality, this inadequacy is problematic.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 96–97.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 96–97.

¹⁷⁷ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 96.

This gives us the beginning of a picture, one of experiences conveyed in art, literature, and in Giussani's personal observation of these attitudes and their effects. Each of these is, for Giussani, an aspect of the same problematic bundle: how easily we accept arguments positioned as resulting from scientific research, the denial of a reality imbued with meaning or perhaps even a reality imbued with reality, and the ultimately dissatisfying investment of some conception of "the ultimate" into a breathtaking mountain scene or utopian social project. These are among the disfigurements that decrease freedom of the human person by setting outside the bounds of reasonability what was once normatively within.

Idolatry has a similar impact, and in Giussani's writing it is a reason inhibitor of fairly expansive application.¹⁷⁸ Issues of God and carved images are not banished from the definition offered in *The Religious Sense*; there is a lengthy quotation from St Paul's "Letter to the Romans" covering such ground and its consequences, and Giussani's phrasing regarding this assertion of mastery concludes unambiguously with the words "... to *claim to be God* [emphasis as appears in text]."¹⁷⁹ However, Giussani also discusses idolatry as an act of epistemological consequences in terms which apply beyond the strictly theological. To allow our gaze, our attention, to settle upon an idol, a fetish, is to there set the limits of human endeavour in possibility and importance, the outer extent of what we may measure and know. This is to lower your eyes from that which is indicated beyond the horizon and instead locate meaning in some less daunting object or idea, one which we can understand and assess, know, and claim mastery of. It is as if you peered out of your window one foggy morning, picked out the most distant object there recognizable, and exclaimed: "There, just across the road, is the limit of all that is and the source of all meaning!".

In Giussani's writing, this is a human failing of no small significance. To take up one among all the aspects of human experience, some part one seems able to understand, to find ultimate significance in it and then stand as oneself the measure of such, is to make a kind of claim to be God. Fixating upon an "idol" of ultimate concern in

¹⁷⁸ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 137.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

this way points not so much to some external other as back to oneself, for it is the limits of perception and the perceiver's matrix of understanding that are being highlighted, rendering the move a self-referential one. In idolatry, an inadequate posture before reality that identifies the limits of possibility with those of personal understanding, we sever ourselves from the transcendent mystery beyond our comprehension. For Giussani, this mystery is the God of Catholic conception, and the knowable world is oriented towards it as signs; however, as demonstrated in the history of scientific discovery, there are always many other things situated beyond the contemporary borders of our knowledge. Idolatry is, in Giussani's reading, a reductive auto-apprehension. In an inappropriate investment of meaning, it results in a less reason-imbued human and a shrunken reality for him or her to move within. On both counts, this is an inhibition upon freedom.

There is a dooming inevitability in this reading of idolatry, despite Giussani's sense of our natural inclinations to the contrary. We are in a structural relationship of inadequacy with Mystery, and our reasoned inquiry, as a stone heaved at the horizon must fall short into the waters, is incommensurate before it. It is all too likely then that an idol will be seized, a surer place for reason to find a hold. For all of Giussani's broadening of that reason, all the further epistemological facets that he invests in it, he sees its fullest potential not in the closed conclusion but in an ongoing openness and receptiveness to reality. This is why worldly existence is a vast system of signs, but our reading of them must remain a hypothesis. Closing off or otherwise diminishing this open question is then an imposition upon human existence. Schemas which bring about this imposition, whether as consciously wielded with power or otherwise, are the source of much of Giussani's concern and inform his rendering of antagonistic normative positions such as those mentioned above.

However, if we are doomed to fall short and into idolatry in our exercise of reason, we are also "doomed" to feel a sense of wrongness, a certain sadness at that idol's inadequacy. Sadness is given great meaning because it carries a sense of an "ought", what ought to be but is not, and is elevated to a kind of internal drive, a form of feedback where we diminish ourselves. It is a tragedy to Giussani that so many misunderstand the source of this sadness and seek to fulfill that "ought" elsewhere.

Whether that fulfillment is sought in political projects, consumerism, inauthentic spirituality, or narcotics, each manifests a misapprehension of this drive.

Quite aside from the personal tragedies, and those depersonalized tragedies of the crowd, there are further systemic consequences of the normative imaginaries which Giussani outlines. One of these is the break with the past, the almost triumphalistic attitude towards the severing of our connection to tradition. He argues that this denial of tradition, far from being an act of emancipation, is an obliteration of memory as it is actively lived in the present, and reduces one to a merely reactive state. To use his example, this condition is analogous to that of dogs running alongside a car, able to recognize, respond to it, and even to play, but not to elicit from it any sense of meaning.¹⁸⁰ Here, that “living in the moment” which one is often urged to engage in is shown as an act of self-harm, for the past enlivens the present and gives energy to our reading of it. Such a rejection such a crucial aspect of life having occurred, what results is “... an individual whose memory has been amputated [and] is sad, impoverished, diminished, dried up.”¹⁸¹ Extrapolating this problem to a societal level brings to mind immediately those societies that have undergone successive revolutionary upheavals and where there have been concerted efforts to re-mold their people to new modes of belief, to construct new social imaginaries. On this Giussani cites Solzhenitsyn who speaks of just such a situation in saying that “Whole speechless generations are born and die off who do not tell each other about themselves”.¹⁸² For Giussani, however, this is not a problem confronting only those states experiencing obviously massive, and often violent, social disruption, but is true of contemporary culture on a much broader scale.

Another issue revealed in Solzhenitsyn’s words that Giussani brings to the fore is incommunicativeness. This is an isolation from others that may be felt even in the most cheerfully talkative crowds of the city and is a further hostile condition obstructing pursuit of the religious sense. Giussani proposes a living, authentically religious community

¹⁸⁰ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 80.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁸² Aleksander I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Nobel Lecture on Literature*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 21, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 84.

whose dialogue is given life by a great well of experience; what he sees are individuals producing an arid chatter, left reactive and isolated even in great crowds, without reasonably judged experience to inhabit their personalities, and limited to "... blabbing out words and vomiting complaints."¹⁸³ Through experience, sheltered by memory and over time judged against further experience, we find points of meaning within the experience of an other. Without this ability to find meaning, we are bound to solitude, a state of being alone driven not by the absence of people but by an absence of meaning.¹⁸⁴ A person caught in this predicament is likely to feel without agency and moved at the whims of powers he or she can scarcely comprehend. This person will lack freedom in its fullest sense.

Giussani's complaint here is an old one, for he is hardly the first person to survey the cultural surroundings and arrive at the conclusion that the prevailing conversations of the day are empty of meaning or significance, that they are but the empty yammering of a fallen civilization. However, the connection with personal freedom is an interesting one: the idle chatter of the everyday is actually indicative of human possibility under constraint. This fettering is a defining trait of the contemporary situation that leaves so many of us caught by an isolation that "... renders the individual at the mercy of the most uncontrolled forces of instinct and power: it is the death of freedom."¹⁸⁵

One of the cases which he uses to demonstrate the impact of this dialogical aridity is the question of what the word "freedom" actually means and, more pertinently, how this question is most likely to be answered. While invoked easily, often, and in support of all manner of causes, concepts, and products, it is a term that most of us will, in Giussani's judgement, define entirely with ideas and images drawn from the common mentality, and thus construct in a way that is convenient to the holders of power. The crucial ideas such as "freedom" which occupy our consciousness, our background understandings, then become alienated conceptions, alienated and alienating. Giussani labels this "slavery", a condition he finds the majority of us to be living in: "If the definition

¹⁸³ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 84.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

of life's most important words is determined by this common mentality, then this ensures our total slavery, our complete alienation."¹⁸⁶ We are only able to free ourselves from such a situation by a great labour, one which he clearly thinks few of us are currently undertaking.

While Giussani's image of the person is of a kind of natural competency with regard to experiencing the matters of ultimate concern, he does not believe that many of us are now able to unravel the implications of those experiences, hindered as we are by dominant and harmful social constructs. Instead, we are likely to have rejected much of what would have allowed for such a natural relationship to reality and, drawn by the normative attitudes of the day, fallen into modes of being more amicable to Giussani's ill-defined wielders of power than to an authentically religious existence lived in reasonable openness to transcendent mystery. The positions that express this range from a priori dismissal of any such area of inquiry to muscular efforts at existential mastery. Taken together, they are a cluster of ideas that are hostile to Giussani's project and contribute to a great diminishment of freedom and of humanity, of human beings and their capability to engage with reality.

This presentation, as outlined above, does put him at some disadvantage as a critic of contemporary life. Because it is focussed on his efforts to understand and present challenges facing the effective communication and reception of beliefs such as his own, the processes which give rise to those challenges, and their impact outside of his own ideal mode of being, are not well fleshed out. At the very least, though he is primarily concerned with effects as personally experienced, some discussion of the mechanisms by which the above attitudes are made dominant would be a useful addition, something beyond an often insubstantial allusion to the violence of social forces or manifestations of power. Of particular relevance to *The Religious Sense's* central intent this would likely aid readers in comprehending their predicament, in seeing just how they were pinned, what forces had stirred them, and what processes had

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 87.

These "most important words" are not limited in Giussani's account to freedom alone. The passage in question reads as follows: "What the love between a man and woman is, what fatherhood is, motherhood, what obedience is, companionship, solidarity, friendship, what freedom is... ."

brought about their present circumstances. This could inform the work of de-alienation, the labour which Giussani alludes to and which appears necessary for one who has not been raised within a prescribed course of Giussanian experiential education. The broad story of why this labour is necessary, and how this unfortunate state of affairs came to be, is related in *Why the Church?*

In moving from *The Religious Sense*, *Why the Church?* makes a useful addition to that text's cataloguing of archetypical experiences personally expressed. Its third chapter finds him taking a very different approach with a historical presentation, though slight, of "... the contemporary difficulty in understanding the meaning of Christian words" as developing through three emerging idea structures: humanism, naturalism, and rationalism.^{187, 188} Each participates in a process of disruptive shifts in the social landscape, changes that have been tremendously instrumental in shaping the context for human action between the Middle Ages and the present. Of course, the divergent paths of society over such an expanse of time far exceed the resources of a chapter such as Giussani's. He does not arrive at anything comprehensive, but his intention is not quite so ambitious as that. He instead mounts the beginnings of an answer to the question: why is it that what was once so easy is now so difficult for so many to arrive at? How, to use his example, did the composers of Assisi's sentinels' hymn experience those words with their religious themes, their call to fight and to defend the city and the soul against evil?¹⁸⁹ What accounts for his own "vexation" at hearing that same hymn performed there in Assisi, and for the inscrutable discordance with which Christian language meets his contemporaries' ears and minds? As Giussani turns to more pointedly later in the same chapter, "What does the phrase 'mortal sin' say to our minds as modern men, far removed as we are from the terminology of classical Christian moral theology?"¹⁹⁰

There are countless points that one might identify as contributing to this unfolding of rupture and disconnection, and writers such as Charles Taylor have devoted vast works to doing so. For Giussani it is those three narratives mentioned above that best

¹⁸⁷ Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 27–61.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

explain a series of changes from unitary mediaeval culture within which Christian beliefs easily disseminated to the current climate in which those same beliefs often appear alien and discordant. Even to the sympathetic mind they seem a "... wall of those words [that we reach] tired before we have even begun to scale it."¹⁹¹ I include his depiction of these three developments not to assess their value as truth claims but to further develop a picture of Giussani's assessment of contemporary religiosity.

Giussani may well be overestimating the unitary nature of mediaeval life, but he is convincing in establishing a decisive contrast in religious attitudes between that societal context and our own contemporary one with regard to adequacy in supporting certain forms of life and of language. Three epochs are selected which highlight the fragmenting move from one to the other. While Giussani does recognize other causes of dissonance, such as disasters, both natural and otherwise, and new and different knowledge sources, these three powerfully inform our own cultural and intellectual inheritance.¹⁹²

The first of these which Giussani touches upon is humanism and its exaltation of the human being, an exaltation which, he wants to make clear, differs sharply from its expression in the Christian tradition. In the latter he finds a kind of "cosmic dignity", a rejection of "... the useless man ..., of the purely banal act" that stands in opposition to time without meaning.¹⁹³ The human is in this tradition freed from chance and from circumstance because he or she participates within an order oriented towards transcendent mystery, an ontologically understood relational order.

By contrast, the humanist celebration of humanity, for all its boundless optimism regarding the mighty efficacy of human energy, finds the human being at the mercy of chance, most particularly the accident of birth that so much that it is to be valorized depends upon. With human strength honoured, the ideal figure is no longer the saint but the successful person in one field or another of earthly endeavour. That success

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹² Ibid., 35.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 39.

becomes the focus of celebration, and those unable to so proudly act upon the world around them thus strive in something of a void of meaning. Most important for Giussani's history is the centering upon the human being itself as ideal reference point. Where the saint as supreme model of life indicated something external, the transcendent, the gesture of the achiever is to the self as agent in the world. It is his or her energies, striving, and power, that have been exercised in bringing about success, and it this action that is recognized. While this does not need to be seen as a move against God, it is one of those shifts by which God simply ceases to be necessary, becomes a being first that does not enter regularly into life, does not in an important sense matter, and then might just as easily no longer exist at all, a presence no longer felt.

The next element of this process which Giussani relates is a kind of naturalism, one that looks to the gifts bestowed upon those who make their mark upon the world and locates nature as the source of those energies. To the mind of the Renaissance, he writes, nature was no longer an indication of God, but rather "... nothing more than the pantheistic notion of God rendered immanent", the idea of the one disappearing into that of the other.¹⁹⁴ With this view of nature comes the assessment that all which comes from nature must be good, whatever its status when considered alongside normative moral conventions. Instinct, feeling, impetuous lunges into decision and action, all are legitimized by such an understanding of nature's powerful impetus and ultimate goodness. From Francois Rabelais Giussani draws the following summation of this attitude: "Do as you will, because by nature man is spurred to virtuous acts."¹⁹⁵ Set against the supports of such spontaneity, the commandments of a God and prescribed rules of acceptable behaviour increasingly present as obstructions to more natural behaviour and thus to the good itself. They become the fetters upon our natural inclinations. Irritation at human achievement so unnaturally halted by rule and regulation produces a move towards something more like outright hostility to an obstructionist God that would make "thou shalt not" pronouncements.

A further effect of this determination of nature as granter of gifts and guarantor of human good is the additional support which is lent to humanist optimism, and this is for

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 41.

Giussani another example of a shortcoming in realism. Reality has not been fully assessed, and resultantly an incomplete snapshot of the human person produced and acted upon as if its representation were indeed true to life. What is missing from the picture, he argues, is the Pauline reminder of human insufficiency. From the “Epistle to the Romans” Giussani quotes: “... for though the will to good is in me, the performance is not, with the result that instead of doing the good thing I want to do, I carry out the sinful things I do not want... .”¹⁹⁶ This is a truth of the human existential situation he sees the Church as preserving, one which recognizes an inclination to the good in the person but also an inability to live long by its virtues. While this is presented as essential to humanity, a law of insufficiency inscribed on our hearts alongside that which turns us towards Ovid’s “better things”, the ontological assessment is accompanied in this area of Giussani’s writing by a wary regard for our historical contingency. His analogy is the ease with which most of us will be able to walk a straight line, and the extreme difficulty which the very same task causes when the line is raised a hundred meters above the ground.¹⁹⁷ In the present, he argues, we are raised in this way and thus unable to “walk the straight line”, to live authentically and realize our religious destiny. He writes of the soul’s wellspring of capability and of it being “... in the concrete ... suffocated by a great weakness”, but this is not Manichaeism, nor will the soul find all physical environments equally high above the ground when it comes to traversing that line.¹⁹⁸ Giussani concludes the paragraph: “There are certain things man is structurally able to do, which historically and existentially he cannot do.”¹⁹⁹ In the contemporary cultural context we are particularly inhibited in this way.

Rationalism completes this trilogy of intrusions upon the attitudes of mediaeval Christianity that have shaped our response to the language of Catholicism. It is the turn to consider “... a correspondence between the workings and dynamics of nature and the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹⁶ Rom. 7:18–19, 24–5a, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 43.

¹⁹⁷ Luigi Giussani, “Religious Awareness in Modern Man,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 1 (1998): 112, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 44.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 44.

workings and dynamics of thought” and so to discover the laws of that exalted nature.²⁰⁰ One product of this process can be seen as the maturation of hardened understandings of reason and conscience which has left both stubbornly resistant to stretching or alteration. With the conscience as the seat of truth, the person as measure of all things, and reason as the solitary device for taking this measurement, we become limited by our own constructs. Reason reified in this way cannot be reformulated to meet new challenges, cannot shift with the inevitable realization that we have been somehow wrong in our understanding. The tools of our discoveries become the instruments of our constraint.

Each of these three participates in a re-centering upon the human person.²⁰¹ Each also contributes to a powerful sense of optimism. Despite the horrors of the last century, this optimism is still in evidence today if no longer prevalent in regard to the end of warfare or such lofty civilizational possibilities.²⁰² For example, it is apparent in the hopeful attitudes some hold regarding scientific resolution to possibly imminent environmental disaster, a technological cure-all that will allow our lives to go on unaltered and without inconvenience. I use a technological example of humanist optimism, and there is indeed a connection here, one that Giussani also draws out. He frames an identified scientism with the words of Henri Daniel-Rops: “Men were looking more and more to science rather than to the intellect for true ‘enlightenment’; what science could not explain must be rejected without discussion.”²⁰³ It is an attitude, produced of those earlier epochs, that Giussani argues has over time only become stronger, embedding itself more deeply in contemporary normative understandings and

²⁰⁰ Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 47.

²⁰¹ Giussani argues that this re-centering is not upon the concrete human but on a highly abstracted “man-in-general” and that this is depersonalizing and damaging, referring to “... man forgetful, first of all, of the essential factors of his own reality, man seen as the subject matter of an abstract conception, the designated victim of human power games.”

Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 54.

²⁰² However, the publication, and popular reception, of works such as Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* does provide some indication of optimism even as to this.

²⁰³ Henri Daniel-Rops, *Church in the Eighteenth Century*, 42, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 54.

leading to an easy readiness in accepting truth claims that are couched in the language of science and transmitted under its banner.

Giussani's critique of "scientism" should not be read as entirely anti-science in substance and dismissed as the work of a religious reactionary. At least, he is careful to explicitly make the point that science itself and the gains made through scientific work are not the focus of his criticism, and those gains are indeed readily apparent in everyday life; having cause to visit the dentist should alone be sufficient for one to give thanks for living at this time and not earlier.²⁰⁴ Instead, his targets are a widely held faith in human progress and the common understanding that rigorous scientific analysis fulfills the fullest depths and reaches of human knowledge and inquiry. In the latter it is a return to his critique in *The Religious Sense* of reason as it is currently conceived, this time given something of a historical narrative. He defines the former, that misplaced faith in progress, as "... the illusion of being able to project into the future accomplishments of which contemporary humanity is incapable."²⁰⁵ Already we have taken up a discussion of Giussani's treatment of reason, and an assessment of the scientific method would be outside the boundaries of the present project, as is the notion of progress as it currently manifests. However, I would like to note that our relationship with science and the findings of scientific studies is less clear than he seems to think.²⁰⁶

The most pertinent facet of this relationship seems to me to be an enormous and, arguably, increasing deficit of understanding: the gap that exists between the reaches of scientific exploration and its reception even by an educated and privileged populace. One might assert that this zone of ignorance is actually an inevitability given the specialized nature of so much of the knowledge that is produced, and indeed its sheer

²⁰⁴ "This is not to decry all the achievements or potential achievements of science and technology."

Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 57.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁰⁶ I should not in any case want to contribute to Feynman's assessment that "Philosophers, incidentally, say a great deal about what is *absolutely necessary* [Feynman's italics] for science, and it is always, so far as one can see, rather naive, and probably wrong."

Richard Feynman *Six Easy Pieces: Essentials of Physics Explained by its Most Brilliant Teacher* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), 35.

quantity, for it demands a tremendous selectivity and prioritisation as to the information available. Unfortunately, something substantially less intentional than that appears prevalent.

It is true that certain topics, such as climate change and vaccinations, do filter into the public consciousness, but they do so with very mixed results. Poorly understood, often poorly written, online articles, “explainers”, or fragments thereof constitute what is likely the bulk of scientific consumption for many, and these are often driven by misleading headlines intended to draw readers rather than improve understanding. Entire fields of knowledge do not popularly register at all. This paper is not the place for consideration of the processes by which paradigmatic constructs borne of scientific research enter and inform our background understandings, nor of commonly voiced scepticism, or confusion, in reaction to claims emerging from scientific work. However, I would like to assert here that the relationship in question may be problematic in a fashion other than that of Giussani's presentation. Still, we are left with his point that we are now epistemologically constrained within the boundaries of a reason informed by the processes of scientific analysis and that this is one of the consequences of the history which *Why the Church?* relates.

While this history clearly has numerous implications, foremost in Giussani's mind is the solidifying constraint applied upon our understanding of truth claims such as those of the Catholic proposal. Nature and reason rationalized and rendered concrete leave that proposal cast as unnatural and invasive, an intrusion that cannot be understood within the operating framework of the reason of the day, or the language of the everyday. This is the substance of Giussani's historical depiction: these epochs, these narratives of human endeavour, were not inherently antagonistic towards the notion of a Christian God; however, as they developed, their effect was an exclusionary one, the echoes of which are expressed in *The Religious Sense*. Now, he argues, the culmination of these processes is as follows:

Even today, acknowledgement of God, the Supreme Entity, comes easily—providing it is clear that he has nothing to do with human reality. God is certainly not denied—as long as it is accepted that man can do without him. And, if someone insists that he cannot do without God, religion will find its own forum in a place set apart from the normal life of

society, in a place foreign to it. This principle of “policing religion,” is the expression of today's genius.²⁰⁷

Giussani is of course here making an extremely generalizing set of statements. The degree to which they are true of, for example, Vancouver, British Columbia; the North American Pacific Northwest; or North America; would require a more specific round of study and discussion, but such is the nature of his invitation. One might be tempted first to look to the words of triumphant professional athletes or political candidates in North America and scoff at this notion that religion, or at least authentic religiosity that indeed has something to do with human reality, is currently policed so as to find no standing in the public sphere. What then of all these very public thankings of God, one might want to ask.

It is a question that takes us down paths already trod by David Schindler, George Weigel, and those who followed them in addressing Cardinal Ratzinger's 1986 provocation, that American Catholicism had developed into a “bourgeois Christianity”.²⁰⁸ This discussion is one I will turn to in the following chapter, for Schindler's assessment of the American cultural condition and its impact upon the possibility of Catholic life is highly convergent with that of Giussani; however, in his treatment, Schindler demonstrates a specificity of language that reveals the shortcomings of Giussani's approach.

Giussani is keenly interested in tradition as essential to human development, its premature denial taking on the significance of self-harm, and in the imposing nature of the socially normative upon our relations with those traditions. He also makes frequent reference to power and to its impact upon our lives. However, regarding both power and tradition there are important aspects missing from his writing, elements whose absence contribute to the inexactitudes of his portrayal where it stretches beyond expressions of existential effect. One cannot escape the sense that Giussani's allusions to the societal threats discussed above form a kind of confrontation with liberalism, but it is a liberalism

²⁰⁷ Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 60.

²⁰⁸ George Weigel, “Is America Bourgeois?,” *Crisis Magazine* October, (1986).

of no name. Without this type of direct and explicit engagement it becomes something of a vague menace lurking in the background.

As we have seen, many of this menace's effects are nicely illustrated by Giussani, but without that engagement, this aspect of his project is incomplete in a way that, I will argue, has substantial repercussions for the other positions he advances. No small matter of nomenclature, this omission is connected to his problematic treatment of our socio-historical context, his consideration of what constitutes a tradition, and his engagement with the idea of power. As such, it creates a tension in his depiction of the contemporary person as crushed by alienating forces that leave religious beliefs authentically lived a distant and difficult prospect. With these forces so vaguely sketched, it is unhelpfully unclear exactly how our possibilities of belief are hindered and how we may escape this predicament.

Chapter 4.

The Disempowering Mystification of Power, and Other Vague Sources of Worry

Luigi Giussani was not, first and foremost, a critic of the culture of liberalism. He did not seek as the primary end of his life's project to mount a critique of contemporary life, and did not set out to locate it as expressing, in Pope John Paul II's terminology, a "culture of death"; nor did he wish to elucidate its manifest flaws and underlying rationale.²⁰⁹ However, during those early days at the liceo, Giussani identified the absence of the Catholic proposal as a live option authentically lived in the public sphere. In his work with GS and CL, and in his writing, he attempted to overturn the dichotomies he saw hardening in Italian society, in public attitudes, and also overwhelmingly in voices from within the Church itself: the religious as set apart from the public, nature from grace, faith from reason, and emotion from rationality. In attempting to rejoin these sundered aspects of life in its wholeness, he also worked to understand and to convey the barriers that prevented enjoyment of the kind of religiously unitary existence he believed was once so unreflectively attainable. It was a twofold alienation that he found in the contemporary condition: an estrangement on the one hand from the very language of lived religion and on the other an incorporation of alienating constructs, ideas disconnected from the individual's own experience that reflected prevailing reductive positions before reality. We were strangers to ourselves and unable to live authentically.

²⁰⁹ Pope John Paul II, "Evangelium Vitae," March 25th, 1995, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html.

He asked “how do we know God?”, and sought to expose, as detailed above in Chapter 3, the ways our social context may cloud this very question beyond comprehensibility.

With these efforts he developed a Catholic critique of modern life, an important facet of his project. In *Why the Church?* the obstructions in the contemporary culture to authentically lived religious belief, particularly that of his Catholic variety, are vital in his explanation of the Church’s place within that context. They are also crucial in describing the felt, or often unfelt, situation of the individual in relation to that institution and its language. Likewise, when in *The Religious Sense* he invites his readers to submit his hypothesis to the verification of their own experiences in the world, the effects of our present socio-historical context form a significant portion of the image which he offers. Throughout that text he finds the human person caught in the grip of certain forces, but for all his detail in outlining attitudes resulting from an environment dominated by these forces, his assessment of the processes by which they act upon the individual, and important aspects of how one ought to be able to free oneself from them, are characterized more often by shortcomings in terminological acuity than by comprehensible discourse. Giussani’s confrontation with our cultural context made him a strong voice on the matter within Italian Catholicism; however, issues that emerge in his treatment thus become potential problems of some consequence for his larger project of de-alienation and liberation. I turn now to these areas of contention.

The sources of difficulty in Giussani’s presentation include an imprecision in terminology and a lack of necessary development regarding quite crucial areas of discussion. The former of these represents an apparent lack of attention that is particularly noteworthy, for he is clearly alert to how our lexicons take on meanings and senses that can be harmful to us. However, while he is quick to seize upon the abuse of the word “freedom” by which it comes to express something reductive, other terms are used in a manner that seems less reflective and cannot sustain his liberating intentions.²¹⁰ Particular examples of this that I have selected are power and tradition. In both cases the lack of detail greatly weakens Giussani’s ability to mount or to convey a substantial critique; specifically, for all of his felt effects and corresponding attitudes

²¹⁰ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 111.

before reality, he is ill-equipped to directly and effectively enter into a discussion of liberalism, the unnamed ghost that seems to haunt much of his writing and especially *The Religious Sense*, the text I will focus on in this chapter.

One project that deserves attention here for its proximity to my own, is that of Robert Di Pede.²¹¹ In his doctoral dissertation he identifies a set of themes—judgement, freedom, and beauty—that he finds to present symptoms in Giussani’s writing that are similar to those I have identified above. For these he hypothesizes five potential causes arising from Giussani’s attitudes and positions: the author’s sensitivity to the reactions of church officials as well as to his youthful intended audience, a potential source of tension in addressing certain issues while maintaining religious orthodoxy; his endeavouring to address a universal audience with regard to their universal problem rather than making specific recommendations that account for their specific context—in language, culture, history, etc.—, a practice that, as we have seen, Giussani does attempt to justify in *The Religious Sense* by invoking certain universalities of the human person; his use of competing approaches within the analysis; philosophical naïveté regarding some fields of inquiry; and the expedient rush from one point on to the next that leaves holes in a less than meticulously constructed argument.²¹² These suggestions represent good starting points and are ideas to keep in mind with regard to the present project, and I will return to consider Di Pede’s restorative reading of Giussani following an introduction to the themes which I will be examining.

Power is the first of these areas that appears lacking in necessary detail. In Giussani’s writing it is a vague force that somehow imposes upon our lives in all manner of ways. It shapes the social air we breathe, threatens to infringe upon our ability to perceive truths and act upon them, and projects damaging belief structures that impose reductive understandings of human possibility, rendering unattainable what we are naturally capable of. Those who possess it, whether by cunning or the good fortune of a favourable birth, may draw upon the beneficial preconceptions that carry the day and the

²¹¹ Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010).

²¹² *Ibid.*, 24–25.

corresponding ideologies and schemas that support them, but just how all of this is so is not entirely clear.

My argument here is not that these points are themselves indefensible. There is much that could be made from them, but Giussani's imprecise establishment of these positions is at odds with their importance within his discourse and does not serve it well. No clear mention is made of what in fact he understands power to be, no analysis developed as to how it is exercised, and no discussion offered as to how it shapes the contours of normative society and governs, intentionally or otherwise, the ideological underpinnings of dominant positions before reality. What are these forces which Giussani points to as so endangering our capability of an open stance before reality? Who, if anyone, directs them, and how? What is the relationship in his writing between power, the powerful, and these "forces" felt by the individual? Such matters may seem quite aside from Giussani's theological considerations, but his understanding of religious life finds its ambit to be all-encompassing and to include the affairs of the everyday, society, and the state. Besides this, Giussani is making the case in *The Religious Sense* that we, his readers, are hindered in living authentically and following our religious sense because our senses of reason and of self are distorted by our harmful socio-historical context. Power is, in Giussani's presentation, an important aspect of this, yet where he seeks to free his audience from these shackles, he provides little hint as to their workings. Where he elsewhere looks, appropriately, to elicit a sense of mystery, here he instead conveys mystification, and this is unlikely to aid in the project of de-alienation which he proposes.

While a full-scale theological analysis of power would certainly be a desirable addition, it does not need to be Giussani's burden in a slim volume such as *The Religious Sense*. I am not looking to make of the text something that it is not and insist on its development into a *Summa Theologica* of ambition and scope; however, there is something of a minimal threshold of explication, for a fusion of horizons to be feasible and for the author to muster the resources necessary for the task at hand, and in his writing in regard to power Giussani does not seem to reach it. He is surely not so ambivalent, or even hostile, to all forms of power or its projectors; his own position of considerable influence within CL did not bother him in this way, nor, it seems likely, would that of Scola and other associates within the Church, though he had his

differences with many inside that institution, and surely there are examples as well. These may seem to be silly points to raise, but Giussani's gestures at depicting power leave as little material for differentiation of this sort as they do for understanding how he views the agendas of the powerful as defining, or perhaps eliciting, sympathetic formations of the prevailing modes of life.

Is Giussani speaking beyond the limits of the particular community he primarily wrote for in a universalizing act of over-generalization, or is there a theological tension at the root of this problem? Does Giussani's limited expertise regarding the category of power cause excessive caution on his part? Is this a case of vagueness brought about in a rush to the conclusion that disallows understanding's more meticulous construction, the rush of "... the apologist who comes onto the scene with answers ready-made and cleverly tries to convince his audience"?²¹³ Each of Di Pede's suggestions is worth consideration, but of all these possibilities, that of self-limitation seems least likely to me. Though there are areas of philosophy which Giussani may write himself into unawares of the established discourse, he does not seem a thinker likely to be so overcome by caution as to allow himself to be paralyzed. It is on the other hand entirely possible that he sometimes feels a matter, in this case power, to be one which he can simply allude to in passing before pushing forwards to topics of greater importance. Of course not all issues in a text demand the same degree of care, the same thorough presentation, but if such is the case here, I would argue that he is mistaken in thinking so. An important gap is left in the picture he offers, and the program for action it entails is weakened as a result.

Power is not the only subject that receives unsuitable treatment in *The Religious Sense*. Tradition is also given a role of great importance but inadequate detail to communicate Giussani's sense of the word and of the forms and processes which it denotes. We are given to understand that tradition is something crucial to the life of the human being and that it is one of the great dangers of contemporary life that the rejection of tradition is viewed with such approval; further, he maintains that those who heed such encouragements and too easily or too early cast aside their traditions are left

²¹³ Ibid., 25.

unclothed in a storm. They are missing something essential to themselves, and this will hinder their engagement with reality and may even prefigure other acts of self-harm.²¹⁴ However, it is not clear what he actually considers tradition to be, though he does offer statements on the matter such as this:

Each one of us is born into a certain tradition. Nature casts us into the dynamic of existence arming us with this complex instrument with which we can confront our surroundings. Every man and woman faces his or her external reality endowed by nature with elements that one finds in oneself as given, already offered. Tradition is that complex endowment with which nature arms us.²¹⁵

There is then some material here, and I do not want to overstate Giussani's lapse. He writes of the fidelity to our past which we must maintain, a kind of critical loyalty required for full engagement with reality, and of the need not to become fossilized within tradition or allow too passively for it to be definitive. Clearly, this is not tradition in stasis but a being through time with which we may interact, first leaning upon it, perhaps later altering it to better suit our needs. One can, he writes, "... visualize tradition as a work plan with which nature equips us down into this great construction site of life and history."²¹⁶ Elsewhere, he compares tradition to a satchel, a bag one carries until ready to examine its contents and judge them for oneself.²¹⁷

As with the case of power these are not offensively unreasonable positions to offer on the topic, and a fairly rich interpretation of tradition could emerge from an exegesis of his writing. Giussani, however, is attempting a redemption of tradition in a climate in which he sees it routinely devalued, often resulting in its harmful rejection, or at times, conversely, "... obscur[ing] or harden[ing] over our original needs ... like an ossified crust that alters the 'evidences' ..." of our natural faculties.²¹⁸ Tradition can

²¹⁴ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 38.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

²¹⁷ Luigi Giussani, "The Risk of Education" (presented at Church of Santa Maria della Passione, Milan, June 6, 1985. Transcript not reviewed by author).

²¹⁸ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 10 & 37.

become either a tool with which we affirm our freedom or one by which we dull ourselves to reality in all its fullness. This is a lively sense of tradition that grants it considerable importance, but the detail which he invests in it does not allow the concept to haul the load then required. Lacking further elaboration, a number of points remain obscure. What, for example, is the criteria by which Giussani identifies traditions, and to what degree has he considered that storm of violence discussed in the previous chapter as itself constituted by a tradition or a constellation of interacting traditions?

At issue is not only the effect of Giussani's imprecision upon what is included in his text but also the question of what a more developed exploration of tradition might allow Giussani to accomplish. I have in mind here an approach like that of Alasdair MacIntyre, one of the foremost thinkers on the topic of tradition, a Catholic writer at least when he came to write what many consider his most important works, and a well-known critic both of liberal culture and of a sense of reason born of the Enlightenment. Unlike Giussani, MacIntyre's analysis of narrative tradition is extensive and has proven fruitful. In taking his work and turning to the idea of liberalism itself as a tradition, where liberalism had often been internally presented as the very absence of tradition, he has formed the basis for a demystifying exploration and well-grounded critique of the sort that Giussani does not establish the instruments to produce, though I do think that he would agree with the assessment. Something not wholly dissimilar is given voice in Giussani's description of progressively anti-Catholic developments in Italian education of the 1950s:

The pseudo-democratic facade of the operation was sustained by equivocal statements on which the state's monopoly of public schools was founded. If those statements, in theory, fail to respect the individual's cultural identity, let alone that of the cohort—precisely because they pretend to view the world impartially from a limbo that stands “over and above the scuffle”—in practice, they paradoxically drug the conscience of youngsters so that they are docile to the cultural manipulation effected either by groups or teachers.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Robert Di Pedè, trans., “Luigi Giussani on the Church and Society in the 1950s and '60s: Interview by Robi Ronza,” Appendix to Robert Di Pedè, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 260.

It is this colloquially put assertion of being "... over and above the scuffle ..." in which there seems to be an anticipation of MacIntyre's idea, that of a quite definite position, liberalism, masked by a projected absence and a neutrality, but it would not be developed in the same way.

Giussani's confrontation is also in a sense with liberalism, but in his writing it is nameless, faceless, seemingly resistant to description, and becomes a whirlwind of manifestations, striking in their violent impact upon the human person but of uncertain origins or constitution. As such it takes on the characteristics of one of writer H.P. Lovecraft's many terror-inspiring figures, so dreadful to experience that they invariably reduce the narrator to terming them "unspeakable" or otherwise quite beyond sane human expression. MacIntyre's is but one example of an alternative, more extensive, approach that allows one to address Giussani's shortcomings while remaining congruent with what is already present in the text, an approach that would render the creature in question "speakable" and thus more comprehensible to the reader.

Another Catholic writer with whom a comparison seems productive is David L. Schindler, the editor-in-chief of *Communio's* North American edition and regular contributor to that journal whose work reflects the Balthasarian influence this implies. Schindler and Giussani possess a similar sense of authentic religiosity, of the importance of beauty and of love, and both have written extensively regarding the inhospitable state of the contemporary social context for their similar understandings of Catholicism; however, it is in their treatment of these common interests that they markedly differ and invite further examination. Schindler has written several articles that are highly relevant to the present discussion.²²⁰ From them I have chosen to focus on his

²²⁰ The following articles are relevant for anyone interested in Schindler's critique of liberalism or his connections to Giussani:

David L. Schindler, "Luigi Giussani on the 'Religious Sense' and the Cultural Situation of our Time," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 1, (1998): 141–150.

---, "Christological Aesthetics and Evangelium Vitae: Toward a Definition of Liberalism," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 22, no. 3, (1995): 193–224.

---, "Liberalism and the Memory of God: The Religious Sense in America," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34, no. 3, (2007): 482–487.

---, "America's Technological Ontology and the Gift of the Given: Benedict XVI on the Cultural Significance of the Quarere Deu," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 38, no. 2, (2013): 239–278.

Ratzinger-inspired encounter with George Weigel and the wider exchange that followed.²²¹ While I will not be recounting these events in their argumentative entirety, I will briefly relate some of the main points below as they pertain to my topic.

In April of 1986, in a *30Giorni* interview, Ratzinger had made the following remark:

In bourgeois Christianity, Christianity becomes a burden that must be lightened to the greatest possible extent. ...This type of Christianity certainly has a strong presence in the mass media. But there is nothing in it which suggests it has a future. One can't feel attracted to a Christianity which has no respect for itself.²²²

Weigel took exception to this, arguing in *Crisis Magazine*, with reference to the historian William Lee Miller and the theologians Jacques Maritain and John Courtney Murray, that America's founding, far from being the ill-considered experiment in individualism which a "Parrington/Beard" reading would make of it, was better anticipated by the figure of Thomas Aquinas than by John Locke.²²³ Seeing a secularization thesis as the foundation for Ratzinger's comments, he went on to address the shortcomings of such a perspective, citing various studies as support for the idea of America remaining firmly a country of believers. Finally, he suggested that "If ever there was a 'Catholic moment' in

---, "The Religious Sense and American Culture," in *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 84–102.

²²¹ For a partial history and bibliography of this exchange see:

Mark Lowery, "The Schindler/Weigel Debate: An Appraisal," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 18, no. 3, (1991): 425–438.

---, "The Dialogue Between Catholic 'Neoconservatives' and Catholic 'Cultural Radicals': Toward a New Horizon," *The Catholic Social Scientist Review* 3, (1998): 41–61.

²²² Joseph Ratzinger interview with Lucio Brunelli in *30Giorni* April, (1986), quoted in George Weigel, "Is America Bourgeois?," *Crisis Magazine* October, (1986).

²²³ In this, Weigel is referencing the American historians Vernon L. Parrington and Charles A. Beard. Beard (1874–1948) is particularly noteworthy for countering the narrative in American history of a fall from Eden, from the perfect founding following the revolution to corruption of one sort or another, with his own critique of the founding fathers' personal economic interests and greed (indeed, the term "Beardism" reflects his prominence in this respect), and it is this depiction of the American endeavour as one essentially flawed from the outset that Weigel is speaking against.

America, it would seem to be now.”²²⁴ This was the case, the argument ran, because the American public, in no state of advanced civilizational decay, was actually eager as ever for very much the kind of proposal that Ratzinger was making, that of “... a Catholicism which has not lost its self-respect”, a “Catholic incarnational humanism... .”²²⁵ With this, the stage was set for Schindler's response which was to appear in *Communio* in the Autumn of 1987.²²⁶

Weigel, Schindler argued, had quite missed the point with his defence of American morality, and no amount of statistics showing high levels of voluntary association membership or participation in Christian denominations, non-accommodating ones or not, could make it otherwise. A theological-ontological approach that did not elide the differences between evangelical Protestant Christianity and Ratzinger's Catholic creedal Christianity would perhaps reveal an American public that was warm to this Protestant Christianity in particular and not equally so, as Weigel would have it, towards Catholicism. Schindler, however, would look beyond this argument to make the case for a secularization that was particularly hostile to Catholicity and quite unlike the welcoming picture that Weigel offered. By engaging only in moral terms with what he identified as bourgeois characteristics such as selfishness and individualism, Weigel had ignored the ontological element that was inherent to Catholic creedal Christianity and in the process even put forth an implicit “bad ontology”.²²⁷ This, Schindler, in reference to Christopher Dawson, labelled extroversion, identifiable as an outward turn of the self *achieving* relation with others through action in contrast to the interiority of the creedal Catholic self *being* in relation to one another.^{228, 229} That many of

²²⁴ George Weigel, “Is America Bourgeois?,” *Crisis Magazine* October, (1986).

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ David L. Schindler, “Is America Bourgeois?,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 14, no. 3, (1987): 262–290.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.

²²⁸ Christopher Dawson, a celebrated Catholic historian himself, has written his own piece on the subject of Catholicism and bourgeois culture from which a quote appears on Schindler's first page (“There is always a temptation for religion to ally itself with the existing order ...”). In it he concluded that in what Sombart had termed the “erotic temperament” (a translation which Dawson acknowledges is insufficient), the Christian ethos of love presented the truest opposition to bourgeois culture.

Christopher Dawson, “Catholicism and the Bourgeois Mind,” *Crisis Magazine* 4, no. 11 (1986): 17–22.

those selves may then go about bowling together, invest their time generously in soup kitchens, or even be seated in church with some regularity, would have no bearing on this fundamental distinction.

Schindler begins his argument with an explanation of Ratzinger's own ontological understanding as drawn from *Introduction to Christianity*, an appropriate choice given both the cardinal's role in provoking the exchange and Schindler's stated intention of taking up the issue on his behalf.^{230, 231} Starting from Jesus' relational unity with God and his "... very being [as] a being-relative or—related" rather than a relation achieved in action, in its doing, this is then established as the ideal relationality by which human existence ought to be understood, not an outward or moral question of deeds but one of being itself.²³² Like Jesus, we are all figures both "from" and "towards" and never indicators only of the self, signs of auto-referral. To summarize:

... in the created order of grace what we all are, that is, in our very *being*, [italics in text] is from-and-for God. In our very being, we are relations of unity with God in Christ and consequently relations of unity with each other in Christ.²³³

Schindler accuses Weigel of failing to understand and account for this aspect of the Christian human person, finding him mired as a result in merely the external moral sense of the aforementioned bourgeois characteristics and thus unable to meet Ratzinger's challenge on what Schindler takes to be its own terms. The position established, Schindler distinguishes "ontological generosity" from "moral-voluntaryist generosity" of the sort Weigel had proposed in support of his claims for a Christian, even a Catholic, American society, and finds Weigel to be an unknowing defender both of bourgeois generosity and of a type of extroverted religiosity whose flourishing Schindler

David L. Schindler, "Is America Bourgeois?," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 14, no. 3 (1987): 262.

²²⁹ David L. Schindler, "Is America Bourgeois?," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 14, no. 3 (1987): 266.

²³⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Crossroads, 1969).

²³¹ David L. Schindler, "Is America Bourgeois?," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 14, no. 3 (1987): 267.

²³² *Ibid.*, 267.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 269.

does not deny.²³⁴ He goes on to look to the consequences of this position, those features of the American socio-religious landscape that are obscured from view in such a perspective, namely those exhibiting an advanced secularization hostile to the creedal Catholicism of Ratzinger and himself.

Schindler's exposition of American secularization focuses on three particular spheres of manifestation, but these specifics interest me less here than does his mode of approach and the contrasts visible with Giussani.²³⁵ I take the two writers to be making highly convergent points about the *doing* of religion and the *being* of religion, but it is only Schindler who puts the matter explicitly in these terms and builds upon them. Something very much of the sort is expressed by Giussani in that passage quoted above in which Giussani muses on a God that has nothing essential to do with the human reality, and here also we can see a similar attitude expressed as he dismisses the Catholic associations of 1950's Italy:

Life in those associations, apart from the occasional burst of enthusiasm, was levelled to the purest moralism: wherever they gathered, the vital complexity of the Christian experience was reduced to the dutiful observance of a few select precepts (and not even the Decalogue was invoked with the same level of determination).²³⁶

Schindler would of course agree that religion manifesting only as moralism of this sort is no adequate indication of a culture's Catholicity. Both writers perceived that their country's religiosity was not to be rightly assessed on the basis of bodies in the pews; however, it is Schindler who makes the argument, with reference to Nietzsche's madman proclaiming God's death before an incredulous crowd, that God is absent "...

²³⁴ Ibid., 274.

²³⁵ The three spheres Schindler identifies are materialism, an ontological ordering of life's patterns and institutions "... toward the satisfaction of the drives linked variously with consumption, sex and power"; a secularization of intelligence, the identification of "the expert" as source of truth and knowledge and of knowledge itself taking on an extroverted understanding and tending towards fragmentation; and American policy and normative attitudes towards abortion.
Ibid., 277–285.

²³⁶ Robert Di Pedè, trans., "Luigi Giussani on the Church and Society in the 1950s and '60s: Interview by Robi Ronza," Appendix to Robert Di Pedè, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 259.

not despite but coincident with the evident religiosity of Americans”, a point that has arguably been a defining one for Schindler.²³⁷ So it is that while the two confront something very similar in society, what is produced by these critiques varies substantially in comprehensive grasp of the problematic if not in the problematic itself.

Schindler's treatment uses a set of distinctions that allows him to depict a secularized American religiosity which he argues is tacitly supported by Weigel's arguments, and to distinguish it from that which would permit the flourishing of a creedal Catholic one.²³⁸ He states at one point:

In response to [Weigel's] claim, I have adduced three counterexamples: what seems to me to be [America's] materialism; its secularized intelligence; and its official toleration of abortion. My argument has been that each of these features is directly a function of the voluntarism and implied ontology of extroversion which I had previously argued is the essence of “bourgeois.”²³⁹

It is a clear position that sits strikingly alongside that of Giussani quoted earlier and even more so with this, his more theatrical presentation:

The community is the dimension and condition necessary for the human seed to bear fruit. For this reason, we can say that the true, the most intelligent persecution, is not the one employed by Nero and his amphitheatre of wild beasts or the concentration camp. The most ferocious persecution is the modern state's attempt to block the expression of the communital dimension of the religious phenomenon. As far as the state is concerned, a person can, in conscience, believe what

²³⁷ David L. Schindler, “Liberalism and the Memory of God: The Religious Sense in America,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34, no. 3, (2007): 483.

²³⁸ These distinctions are drawn from “(1) the Scriptural texts which indicate that Jesus Christ is a relation of unity with the Father; (2) the Scriptural texts which indicate that we, all of us, are in and through Jesus Christ, also related to and united with the Father; (3) the text of the Creed of Nicaea which ontologizes Jesus' relation of unity with the Father; (4) finally, the texts from the Fathers of the Church which, consistently with the text of Nicaea, ontologize the relation and unity of all men with the Father in Jesus.”

David Schindler, “Is America Bourgeois?,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 14, Fall (1987): 289–290.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 284–285.

he likes, as long as this faith does not imply that all believers are one, and therefore, have the right to live and express this reality.²⁴⁰

Tucked amongst what many would consider to be highly hyperbolic vagaries regarding state power and religious practice, one can see an indication of the ontological element of his critique; however, it is less developed than Schindler's, and while one can see the logic of its impact upon his sense of the communital, the dominant image of wider society remains that of something chaotic and bewildering, dangerous and not entirely understood or, I think more accurately, not conveyed entirely understandably.

This sort of mystification is arguably disempowering, and against its author's intentions may itself serve to obscure and so to bolster the very ideologies and constructions against which it is deployed. Confusion itself becomes a mask that frustrates adequate forms of confrontation, and where Giussani wants to alert his readers to the forces by which they are caught, he offers little aid in comprehending them and thus risks obscuring what he endeavours to reveal. It seems very much the sort of problem that Di Pede seeks to counter with his own restorative reading.

In his dissertation, Di Pede makes reference to the problems Giussani's idiosyncrasies can pose, whether for the well-read philosopher or the student attending a CL School of Community gathering.²⁴¹ At these meetings, he attests to having witnessed many dialogues mired irrecoverably in confusion over interpretation of the author's inexact and at times seemingly internally incoherent use of language, and states that his own "... writing was motivated by the frustration of readers who complained of difficulty understanding and applying Giussani's practical-theories-to-live-by to cases in ordinary life."²⁴² Giussani, he rightly points out, wrote not as a practice of theological exercise but in practical measures to address the real concerns confronting his peers and, perhaps more often, the youths around him.²⁴³ While it can hardly be demanded of a writer that

²⁴⁰ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 131.

²⁴¹ Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 23 & 44.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 245.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19–21.

his or her readership in its entirety demonstrates unblemished comprehension at all times, that Giussani be held responsible for every inch and both ends of this equation, given that these are intended to be resources for practical application, the issue of his readership's understanding and utilization represents a significant determining factor as to the effort's success or failure. In this case, it seems fair to say that a narrative of some confusion is identifiable in readers' response to Giussani's works, and in examining his writing, the reasons for this become readily understandable.

Di Pede's approach is a restorative one, seeking the intended sense of Giussani's project and sustaining it in terms that overcome the inadequacies of the original text while retaining its particular logic. In this difficult task he takes up the tools of Peter Ochs whose analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce attempted to reclaim what was "irredeemably vague" by way of a multi-layered process of excavation.^{244, 245} Doing so requires reading, in addition to the plain-sense, a "deeper plain-sense" that does not attempt to reconstruct authorial intent but rather the problems that motivated and gave shape to its inquiry.²⁴⁶ The immediate historical context, intellectual and traditional biography, and the tendencies or habits in the author's thought are all drawn upon as part of the implicit text from which these problems are teased. This, in theory, allows the reader to reorient the resources of the text more adequately towards them in an act of repair.²⁴⁷

I will not restate the results of this ambitious project in its entirety. However, Di Pede's first chapter, exploring the category of judgement, is of interest to me, for it deals specifically with *The Religious Sense*, the text that best represents Giussani's epistemology, and includes a number of points that may prove to be illuminating in regard to power and tradition, the latter also being crucial to Di Pede's inquiry.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 26–30.

²⁴⁵ Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁴⁶ Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 29.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 26–30, 245.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 36–107.

In that chapter, he argues that a plain reading of *The Religious Sense* is all too likely to leave the reader bewildered by the variety of material to which “the heart” is used in reference. For Di Pede these include distinctive Augustinian, Aristotelian, and Heideggerian senses that are not obviously congruent, particularly as Giussani proceeds to demonstrate correspondence between the self-revealing object and the inward resources of the subject.²⁴⁹ Readers of *The Religious Sense* are also, he argues, likely to feel ill-equipped, left immobile and uncertain, when they encounter competing intuitions internal to a tradition.²⁵⁰ Finally, there is the apparent tension in the text between “... the importance ... of forming the heart in a community where masters impart the tradition of centuries to novices” and “... trusting the heart as already ready to recognize the truth on immediate impact.”²⁵¹

There are of course feasible interpretations of the text other than Di Pede’s and some that could perhaps resolve the conflicts which he finds. He himself makes reference to Scola’s assessment that Giussani’s working of subject and tradition had achieved a “... capacity to regain the best results of transcendental thought about freedom.”²⁵² While certain expositions might cast authority, freedom, or tradition so as to alleviate some or all of the issues he raises, this does not run counter to Di Pede’s project, for his impetus is to be found in the scope for confusion and in the tensions that frequently emerge when the text is taken, as its author intended, to be suggesting a practicable methodology. In an effort to recover this practicality he delves into the implicit text, the volume that is inclusive beyond *The Religious Sense*’s printed pages to encompass Giussani’s intellectual predecessors, interpretive patterns, and the context of

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 39–41.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 107.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 105.

²⁵² Angelo Scola, “A Style of Thought,” trans. Patrick Stevenson, in *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani*, ed. Elisa Buzzi (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 16, quoted in Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 105.

the book's original proposal. With each of these areas he produces material of interest, but it is the last that I will pursue further here.^{253, 254}

The Religious Sense has lived an active life, undergoing more changes in its publishing than any other of Giussani's works.²⁵⁵ Originally published in 1957, inspired by Archbishop Giovanni Battista Montini's (Pope Paul VI) archdiocesan letter for Lent, "*Sul senso religioso*" (On the Religious Sense), it was intended for the reflective use of the *Gioventù Italiana di Azione Cattolica Milanese's* adult members.²⁵⁶ Two years later it would be expanded, in an essay of the same title, to a program of nine lessons on the original's themes.²⁵⁷ Jaca Books released a further development in 1966 with *Il senso di Dio e l'uomo moderno. La "questione umana" e la novità del Cristianesimo*, republishing with some changes in 1977 before the 1997 edition that would be the first entry in Giussani's *PerCorso* trilogy.²⁵⁸ Di Pedè's study, like my own, is concerned with this last form of the text, but the connection with its predecessors, produced in the 1950s and 1960s, is an important one, dealing as it does in the same basic themes that its author

²⁵³ In the first category Di Pedè submits, with some justification, Cardinal Newman and Maurice Blondel as fellow travellers against whose inquiries and arguments Giussani's may be rubbed. Both are demonstrated, in Giussani's own acknowledgements and in accounts of teaching at Venegono, to have deeply informed Giussani's theological studies there, and their works would later serve as models of religious methodologies that proceeded from the human person rather than reflection upon the divine, proposals that might lend a new impetus to re-evangelization. They are also noteworthy here for their respective responses to the challenges posed by the development of "proof" as a concept, particularly by the Enlightenment borne expectations regarding certitude, and the pressures these can cause. In Blondel, this can be seen in the science of action he advanced, and in Newman, it is apparent in his Aristotle-inspired delineation of reasoned judgement so as to find a place for intuition.

Robert Di Pedè, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 49–67.

²⁵⁴ Di Pedè identifies three interpretive habits: anti-idealism, expressed in Giussani's theory of correspondence between subject and self-revealing object; Augustinian Thomism, in the emphasis in his Thomism upon the dynamism of the restless heart, desirous for unlimited fulfillment and desirous for God; and non-philosophical Romanticism, both in the style and the substance of his writing, the poetic references so as to frame the world on the one hand and the raising up of affectivity, not sentimentalism, at the expense of rationality on the other. *Ibid.*, 69–94.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

had initially engaged with. A great deal can be learned of the more recent work by way of the context that produced those initial statements.

Giussani had noted how inadequate the outreach employed by groups such as AC was. The appeal made was merely "... moralistic and sentimental" and did little to mend the divide many nominal Catholics felt from Christianity as something essential and immediate to their everyday lives and culture.²⁵⁹ Clearly a new method was required. As we have seen, the power of the Marxist appeal in those years was extremely strong, particularly so among the youth, and Giussani responded to it in works directed towards figures such as Antonio Gramsci and Ernst Bloch, and to the students took up their ideas.²⁶⁰ By Di Pedè's reading, it is the cultural permeation of these ideas and the degree to which Giussani viewed young Catholics as vulnerable to their persuasion that largely constitutes the engine of his concern; it is the answer to Iris Murdoch's question to be asked of any philosopher: "what is he afraid of?"²⁶¹ While we have seen how later groups and events associated with CL might find their model in successful Marxist efforts of the same category, here the influence is of a different sort.

Giussani wrote with the re-evangelization of Italian Catholic students in mind, and he saw in their behaviours mere survivals, actions whose purpose had been in a sense forgotten and were no longer fuelled by an authentically Catholic culture. In the student riots of 1968, however, he saw "... an 'anti-authoritarian rebellion' which had a sincere first impulse" and required some response.²⁶² It is with an eye to the success of the Marxist positions and, Di Pedè argues, certain strong Nietzschean tendencies that he

²⁵⁹ Quoted in Massimo Camisasca, *Comunione e Liberazione: Le Origini (1954–1968)*, vol. 1 (Cinisello Balsamo [Milan]: Edizione San Paolo, 2001), 96, quoted in Robert Di Pedè, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 15.

²⁶⁰ Robert Di Pedè, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 17.

²⁶¹ Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1999), 359, quoted in Robert Di Pedè, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 1.

²⁶² "CL e il '68," ed. Davide Rondoni in *Litterae Communionis – CL*, 20.5 (May 1993): 13, quoted in Robert Di Pedè, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 155.

sought to propose a new method for reconnection.²⁶³ This is the path Di Pede traces in *The Religious Sense*: an epistemology of the heart that expands reason in the face of Marxism and scientific idealism, but one that in its emphasis upon individual authenticity results in potential frictions with the loyalty to tradition that Giussani would also staunchly maintain.

Giussani was writing this proposal to an audience that was demonstratively anti-establishment and in whom he recognized certain romantic notions of authenticity and of individualism, positions that would directly inform their reception of religious claims.²⁶⁴ “The heart” was, Di Pede argues, conceived with this in mind, a method grounded in reflection upon personal experience that would be congruent with these inclinations, for, as we have seen, Giussani genuinely considered the desires and concerns of the young as problematics to be addressed appropriately.²⁶⁵ However, something further would be needed lest this all slide into a Nietzschean answer, or a Protestant one for that matter, and so the heart was joined with tradition, for Di Pede a troublesome step: “While Giussani correctly recommends the heart to his readers to correct reductionist approaches to reason, it seems he overextends his claim by positing the unity of hearts accorded to a single tradition.”²⁶⁶ These elements, presented to a particular audience facing the pressures of a particular context are now in *The Religious Sense* universalized for a much wider broadcast, transferring problems already present and perhaps manufacturing new ones in displacement.

Di Pede finds one of the causes of Giussani’s issues to be the writer’s excessive consideration of his split audience and their response: that of the anti-authoritarian youths to whom he addressed himself and the figures within the Church. The depiction is not entirely a convincing one though. While perhaps such considerations did contribute

²⁶³ Di Pede draws our attention to two of Giussani’s early critiques, of Nietzschean philosophy and of Marxism, in “La risposta dell’umanesimo scienista” and “La risposta dell’umanesimo scienista” respectively.

Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 37.

²⁶⁴ Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 106.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 106–107.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

to the muddied waters now apparent on the page, Giussani's writing on the historical role of the Catholic Church, which embodies at least one form of tradition imbued with authority, is too substantial for his evocation of tradition in *The Religious Sense* to be seen as only a nod towards maintaining orthodoxy or a simply pragmatic check set against any slide into relativism, appropriate to the task at hand but basically not invested in as a truth claim. Likewise, "the heart" is absolutely foundational to Giussani's epistemology and seems traceable more to his very early fascination with Leopardi than to any pragmatically formed appeal to Marxist sympathizers.

Returning to the factors hypothesized in Di Pede's introduction, he cautiously suggests philosophical naïveté regarding the addition of tradition to the method of the heart, and there may be some truth to this. Giussani has written extensively of the life of one particular family of traditions and of its transmission through time of an event both piercing history and transcending it. Equally, he has discussed what it is to live in a particular sort of community with relation to that tradition and its institutions. However, as I earlier indicated in making the comparison with MacIntyre, he does not adequately define and consider what it is to be a tradition, and this plays into the problem of grand narrative that Di Pede identifies: Giussani's missive to the Italian students may have been soundly considered for that immediate purpose, but it lacks the philosophical sustenance for its projection upon a universal application to then be a total success.

In his dissertation, Di Pede also includes some discussion of power, my other category of interest, when he addresses the theme of freedom in Giussani's work, specifically in the as yet untranslated collection of writings *L'io, il potere, e le opere: Contributi da un'esperienza*.^{267, 268} He finds power problematic "...on the basis that Giussani's maxims fail to equip his audience with tools to achieve the concrete results they intend to deliver."²⁶⁹ This criticism, that practicality of application is found to be exceedingly difficult for many of Giussani's readers, is paired with admiration for his

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 108–171.

²⁶⁸ Luigi Giussani, *L'io, il potere, e le opere: Contributi da un'esperienza*, (Genova: Marietti, 2000).

²⁶⁹ Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 112.

intent to convey methods conceived not for the world of theoretical game-play but that of immediate issues, a laudable objective that establishes a high standard for success.

My own place of entry into discussion of power remains *The Religious Sense*, where, as discussed above, it is rendered a great but terribly mysterious threat upon the horizon, seemingly always present but never directly engaged with. Are Di Pede's earlier suggestions, drawn from examination of a different theme but the same text, helpful here? Does Giussani's superficiality of treatment in this area indicate some trepidation brought on by a lack of knowledge regarding this issue? Though hardly conclusive, his acknowledged intellectual indebtedness to figures such as Gabriel Marcel and Romano Guardini makes him seem unlikely to have not given the topic its due attention or to be so non-conversant with it as to be reduced to vague allusions.²⁷⁰ Might it be instead that he considered the anti-authoritarian streak of his intended audience and salted his presentation with vague but appealing mentions of the dangers of "power"? Perhaps he had something of the sort in mind, pragmatic considerations as to the success of a re-evangelization in direct competition with Marxist sentiments; however, the characterization does not resemble that presented by Zucchi of a writer possessed of "... a profound sense of the philosophical weight of words and [one who] struggled to use the most adequate language to approximate Mystery."²⁷¹ Though still possible, it seems incongruous that a writer of this description would make repeated use of a term signifying little of substance, an appeal without content to the popular opinions of the day. Indeed, such an act would also completely conflict with Giussani's writing in regard to those popular opinions and the problems they can pose.

The reminder that we not forget the audience Giussani was originally addressing with that earlier version of *The Religious Sense* is a very useful one here, for it is suggestive of an explanation that I find most persuasive in accounting for Giussani's seemingly inattentive treatment of power. That community for whom he was writing was a relatively small one, and it was founded through developing dialogues of mutual

²⁷⁰ Robert Di Pede, trans., "Luigi Giussani on the Church and Society in the 1950s and '60s: Interview by Robi Ronza," Appendix to Robert Di Pede, *Luigi Giussani: A Teacher in Dialogue with Modernity*, Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2010), 265.

²⁷¹ John Zucchi, "Translator's Preface," to Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), X.

concern. The participants at these gatherings would have been of similar backgrounds, raised in the same traditions, breathing the same cultural air and speaking, both literally and figuratively, the same language. While I am not arguing that there was total homogeneity among the young, Italian Catholics of the area at that time, it seems fair to propose that there would have been a substantial shared matrix of understanding among them. Not just any young, Italian Catholics in studies around Milan, those whom Giussani addressed were largely ones with at least some experience of the dialogues he had instigated, and thus they would be familiar with the mode and manner of those meetings, with their common themes and the approaches taken to them. There would be common referents, the indicators of which need not be explained. Power may have been one of these.

It is not my intention here to prove this point, but it seems likely that “power” was one of the many shorthand designations that attendees at early GS or CL gatherings would draw a common understanding from, that it raised a regularly discussed range of problematics and would point back to prior conversations. In those early manifestations of *The Religious Sense* it may have been used in much the same way with the expectation that its readers would need no further indicators as to what was meant. For that particular readership at that particular time, this communication quite possibly would have been entirely satisfactory; however, as the text presently reads when broadcast to a general, universal, audience, it is not. Those touchstones of shared experience are not present, so as Giussani gestures at “power” in his writing, it is unlikely to convey an adequate understanding.

Whatever the cause, these lapses are substantial ones without which the text is incomplete, for the reader’s labours of liberation must now be taken on without a clear picture of just how we are confined. Giussani’s frequent evocation of “power” requires accompanying delineation in the absence of which it is an act of mystification rather than the one of unmasking that he intends it to be. “Tradition” is also made to carry a great deal of weight within his design yet lacks the flesh on its bones to do so, and, as I have argued, hinders both the readers in their comprehension and the author in his critique. As is the case of those themes discussed by Di Pede, these shortcomings hinder the development of a project intended for direct application in the immediate lives of those who would embrace it. Read in the absence of consideration for authorial intent, the

problems I have identified are perhaps not so glaring. It seems to me that we do not tend to ask of every book that the critique it offers be in the form of actionable analysis; however, here the author's desire for practical effect upon the world is unmistakable. It is the desire that moved Giussani up those three steps which I began with, and the desire that informs texts such as *The Religious Sense*. Giussani intends in this book an intervention that challenges unnoticed barriers to Catholic belief, and in a broader sense freedom by his understanding, and reveals to readers both those barriers themselves and the religious sense, inherent to human nature, which they are obscuring. At least in regard to the first of these he falls short, and this harms his elucidation of the second.

Chapter 5.

Conclusions: Proposals, Problems, and Possibilities

Sprung from a childhood immersed in the arts as well as in religion, from a varied course of studies at the seminary in Northern Italy and in North America, from the crucial encounter on the train, and from the verification in the liceo that followed, Giussani's project would span the lifetime of an individual fully invested in the importance of everyday life, the truth of his faith, the education of those around him, and the recognition of the public culture's impact upon the private religious beliefs of the individual. It would see the growth of the GS and then the founding of CL and many associated communities besides, the acknowledgement of many of Catholicism's most important figures of the time, and the production of a body of work of great substance, both in volume and in its contributions to the topics he found most crucial. Giussani saw in that conversation on the train, and with many students thereafter, the terrible effects of what he viewed as the Church's blindness to the importance of culture and the void left by its lack of cultural engagement. With very practical means, both proposed in his writing and expressed in the meetings and activities that he initiated, he set out to address these problems.

CL has become a movement of considerable size and influence in its home country of Italy, and internationally, while significantly less well known, it continues to grow. The study of Giussani is useful in furthering our understanding of this religious movement and the beliefs of those active within it, but his writings are not only of interest for this reason. He represents an important philosophical voice within Catholicism and

one that engages with many vital contemporary issues: our relationships to our traditions, to our social circumstances, and to our very thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Contributing to discussions of epistemology, of human nature, of a theological ontology, and to contemporary culture, he is worthy of study both within the ambit of Catholic thought and as a figure involved in the wider philosophical conversations of the past century.

It is Giussani's written work that I have been concerned with, and it constitutes a collection of surprising variety, from handbooks detailing the functions and practices of the early GS experience to analyses of Protestant theology. Of this body of work, while I have occasionally referenced other texts such as *The Journey to Truth is an Experience* or *Why the Church?*, my chosen focus has been *The Religious Sense*, one of his more widely read texts and also the one in which he details his epistemological stance, perhaps the position that best defines Giussani as a writer. I make this last point because it seems the most vital area of Giussani's thought and one that it is necessary to grasp before turning to any other of the topics which his writing examines. Additionally, it perhaps serves best in delineating his position, throwing into relief his understandings of reason, judgement, and the role of the human emotions.

There is, Giussani argues, no such act as disinterested judgement, nor any dispassionate judge to carry it out. We are thinking, feeling, and emotive beings, and we should not attempt to isolate this "thinking" aspect from the others. We are also bodies, and this must not be separated from the apparatus of reason as if reason were some kind of subroutine that might be run regardless of what suffering or joys, hunger pangs, physical trauma, or excitement may be manifesting in its fleshy casing. "The hypothesis of reason without interference" is a reductive imposition upon human understanding that distorts our view of our selves and our conception of what it is to reason and to know.²⁷²

Giussani sees reason at a crisis point, resulting from the epistemological turn of the Enlightenment to subjectivity and away from the ontological perspective. The resulting conception of reason and reasoning is limited and limiting, a diminished tool

²⁷² Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 26.

become one of auto-restriction rather than reality apprehension. Against rationalistic culture and its Cartesian echoes, Giussani sets his own expansive understanding which reconnects reason to the real. What is reason if not the act of reasonability, and what is it to be reasonable if not to be open to reality? Reason, in Giussani's writing, is the appropriate response to being, not a withdrawal into thought games. The epistemology that Giussani proposes is supported as that demanded by reality itself, and rather than beginning from the intellect, the method of knowing is determined by that which we seek to know.

It is for Giussani grossly misleading to conceive the reasoned verification of truth as the exclusive property of the scientist working in a sterile laboratory and operating with a sterile mind, unclouded by emotions and thus able to proceed with judgement undistorted. He seeks to recover and redeem the affective self against dualistic feeling and thinking misconceptions that would find a useful role only for the latter. We feel, and this is also an inseparable aspect of how we know. It is not a debilitating practice to be amputated, dehumanizing and in any case impossible, so as to allow a clear picture of the world to somehow emerge; "... it represents the condition by which the eye, or our reason, sees in accordance with its nature."²⁷³

It is in our nature to be able to perceive and know reality, though this capacity may be diminished by our circumstances and what we make of them, and this nature, for Giussani, is that of all of us no matter where and when we are born. This is because there are certain basic primary drives inherent to us all, aspects of our "elementary experience" to which we may refer in the intensely moral act of verification and decision.²⁷⁴ We all have this core of ourselves that is a bundle of inclinations, to truth and to happiness for example, and we may hold what comes before us against it in comparison. It is our "heart", the spark of our being from which our actions initiate and against which our decisions and experiences ought to be tested.

Speaking of experience in a Giussanian sense is, as with reason, to imbue the term with a meaning different than its common understanding. What he has in mind here

²⁷³ Ibid., 28.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 7.

is not the experience of the collector who checks off items—skydiving, India, chocolate-making—on an aspirational to-do list. Indeed, it is not something to be acquired at all, at least in the sense this would often be meant. Our elementary experiences we begin with, no matter our background, and up to them we hold reality. In a kind of mutual verification they are matched with the world as it reveals itself to us; the heart moves to meet reality, and on the basis of this correspondence our intuitions, judgements, and interests are driven. When Giussani does speak of experience as it is commonly defined it is still to something richer that he refers. “Just being there” and trying or sampling is insufficient, for experience without judgement is no experience at all, not without the engagement of the heart in understanding and drawing meaning.

As is apparent, his is not a looking within that comes to rest upon relativism or subjectivity. While our cultural context and the traditions in which we are raised may obscure it, there is this core set of inclinations that is natural to the human being. There is also a teleology in Giussani. Unencumbered by the burdens we may be born into or otherwise encounter, the heart will find correspondence with the mystery for which being is a set of signs, for all the world and all of existence is filled with this signifying. This view is evident in Giussani’s urgings that we engage with life in all its facets, and that the small matters of the everyday are greatly significant, crucially so, and not by dualistic exclusions to be dismissed. This is also a position that can be seen in Giussani’s frequent referrals to music, painting, or poetry in making his points, for there too signs are evident. Reason, even in his expansive understanding, will not bring us to our fullest destiny. To come to rest at the limit of reason’s reach and there to locate meaning is for Giussani an act of idolatry. However, reason does contribute to our apprehension of those signs which are indicative of transcendent reality. It is in our reasonable openness to reality that we allow ourselves to find correspondence with it.

One can locate the religious sense as this meeting of heart and reality at its highest level, that of the dramatic, emotional, and intellectual pursuit of questions such as are asked by Leopardi’s nomadic shepherd: “Wherefore those many lights, // That boundless atmosphere, // And infinite calm sky? And what the meaning // Of this vast

solitude? And what am I?"²⁷⁵ The religious sense is in other words that Augustinian yearning of the heart after the ultimate, a yearning that manifests in the great questions as to life, its meaning, and its purpose. These questions, this driving desire and need, push us towards our destiny, towards the mystery that is indicated all around us in existence itself, towards, for Giussani, God.

If all of this seems a rosy picture of human possibility and one hardly borne out in immediate observation of the contemporary world then that is quickly corrected. These are the aspects natural to the human being, but Giussani does not view them as operating independently of our historical situation. Indeed it was his realization as to the effects of Italian culture, and the Catholic Church's reclusion from it, that launched him upon his path. He saw that in the absence of Catholicism as a lived proposal, various attitudes and belief structures, often mirrored within the Church itself, had developed that militated against the basic ideas and the very language of that proposal.

For all the inherent drives and their telos which he found in the human person, Giussani understands the conditions into which we are born, our traditions and social norms, to be all but decisive in determining our direction and ways of thinking. I say "all but" because Giussani was no social determinist. He understands us still to have our heart, our elementary drives and religious sense, to refer to. It is just that in contexts such as the present one, we are likely to find these resources obscure to us, distorted or ruled into non-existence and banished from our person by prevailing ideologies and reductive modes of human self-understanding. We are in other words capable of much more than we have come to conceive of, and Giussani turns to our cultural context, the space which the Church had vacated with disastrous results, in identifying the causes of this misfortune.

Why is it, he asks, that the Catholic proposal now presents as something remote to so many, even to those raised within the Catholic tradition? How is it that its very language is felt as alien and incomprehensible, and rejected as non-absorbable by

²⁷⁵ Giacomo Leopardi, "Night Song of a Nomadic Shepherd in Asia," in *Selected Prose and Poetry*, trans. Iris Origo & John Heath-Stubbs (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 275, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 46.

contemporary background understandings? The answers for Giussani largely lie in that cultural context, the socio-historical circumstances which we are born into and that act upon our nature in such a way as to leave us at odds with our selves and our own resources. How easy it is for us to stand on a line, he offers by way of example, but how hard when that line is raised up high into the air.²⁷⁶ We are, now and in the years that Giussani wrote, elevated some height above the ground, and we find ourselves thus unable to put one foot before the other as once came to us with such unthinking ease.

Giussani's most effective writing with regard to this "elevation" concerns the attitudes commonly expressed and lived out by individuals so situated. He presents them as the reductive positions taken before the questions which the religious sense is oriented towards, reductive both of those questions and of the human itself, and he does this by way of poetry, fictional prose, and personal anecdote. Positions so expressed include fulsome investment of meaning in utopian political pursuits, social projects, or historical progress, submersion into aesthetic evasion or desperate denial, and rigid insistence on impermeability. Some of these are quite apt in locating something very recognizable, and of the moment, in human expression; others tend more toward the path of some few individuals. Giussani explores each of them with evident sympathy, for he sees in them the expression of that Augustinian yearning misdirected, self-defeating sources of further sadness.

Along with these archetypal responses, Giussani offers something of a prescription for regaining our epistemological resources and with them our telos, our destiny. It requires a life ordered entirely to this purpose, not only on particular days of the week, and to the truth above all else. Initial loyalty to our tradition is emphasized, as is the importance of testing that tradition's contents against the evidences of our heart and our judged experience as we become better able to do so. The communal dimension is asserted as necessary, and the importance of educational relationships within it. In overall effect, the effort is to sweep away what obscures our religious sense, to liberate us and allow us to perceive, as we are naturally able to, the signs which our reality is permeated with.

²⁷⁶ Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University

In the strength of his consideration for the impact upon the individual, and the individual's response to it, Giussani throws into relief his treatment of what it is that is so impacting them. What exactly is hindering the kind of life his prescription calls for? It is in addressing this important question that his approach reveals problems. A partial answer is to be found in the social circumstances we live in and the traditions in which we are raised. For Giussani, a blind adherence to tradition, one without judgement, is likely to cloud the evidences of our experience and of our heart, hardening like a shell upon our person that dulls the senses, but it is just as problematic to reject too quickly our traditions and break with the measures and guidance they provide and the aspect of one's person that they represent. To take this latter step is to be exposed to the storm that is the social world unmediated. There, it seems our heart alone will not suffice, for we are as yet unprepared to verify by experience the reality we encounter both within and without. It is better, once we are sufficiently able to constructively engage them, to make of our traditions the tools for our onward journey. They are not then static monoliths unless we treat them as such and allow ourselves to be encased. Instead, they are vital bundles to be shaped in a manner reflective of reality, and used in our interactions with it.

If we are found by Giussani to be naked without our traditions, then the next question of course is one of what exactly it is we are so unprotected against. Most immediately apparent as dangerous are the normative opinions that govern our surroundings. Whether they are presented by figures of immediate authority, professed by politicians or pop-stars, re-tweeted within one's social circles, or otherwise easily and unthinkingly accepted in the public sphere, these are the attitudes that, allowed to bypass our elementary experience and sense for verification, encase us in the alienating positions of others. Giussani urges us to first make our own assessments and only then bring these into dialogue with those of such external authorities.

This appears clear enough, perhaps a little obvious but also rarely actually taken seriously or acted upon. However, Giussani seems to have something beyond this in mind when he writes of the dangers that surround us, ones that impede our religious

Press, 2001), 44.

sense and, he believes, keep us from the truth. Consider the following passage, cited above in Chapter 4 and drawn from *The Religious Sense*:

The community is the dimension and condition necessary for the human seed to bear fruit. For this reason, we can say that the true, the most intelligent persecution, is not the one employed by Nero and his amphitheatre of wild beasts or the concentration camp. The most ferocious persecution is the modern state's attempt to block the expression of the communital dimension of the religious phenomenon. As far as the state is concerned, a person can, in conscience, believe what he likes, as long as this faith does not imply that all believers are one, and therefore, have the right to live and express this reality. To obstruct communital expression is like cutting off the roots that nourish the plant: the plant soon dies.²⁷⁷

Certainly there is more here than merely the power of common opinion gone uncontested. There is agency, intelligence, and persecution, and there is power of another sort at work here. However, as I have argued, crucial details regarding power are missing from Giussani's presentation, as they are from other categories that are also of substantial importance to his project.

Tradition is one such category. As we have seen, it is clear that this is crucial to Giussani's conceptions of personhood, pedagogy, the health of our relationship to surrounding society, and the development of one's epistemological adequacy in regard to reality. In light of this, it is somewhat startling that he does not more fully engage with what it is that he is calling tradition, and his failure to do so produces a number of consequences. Most obviously, it adds an area of vagueness to a proposal which is intended as entirely practical so that readers may take up the proposed method and apply it readily to their own life. Such patches of fog as this do little to assist them in doing so, and it is no great surprise to read of meetings at which discussions aimed at attempting such an application collapse into a mire of speculation as to his intended meaning. There is also the matter of what a fuller reading of tradition might have allowed Giussani himself to accomplish or at least convey to the reader, particularly with his dramatic rendering of our violent surroundings. In Chapter 4, I raise the example of

²⁷⁷ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 131.

Alasdair MacIntyre's approach as one that turns a more elaborate sense of tradition upon our social context with positive results, but there are others one might take up. The point is that something of the sort might have allowed Giussani to better explore our social context and make of it a world if not less threatening than at least less mystifying. Even if it added little to his own understanding, it would surely have facilitated a more comprehensible portrayal for the reader to work with.

Similar points can be made regarding power. Unlike tradition, it is in Giussani's writing not a tool of people's development; it pertains more to the context in which they strive, contributing to that threatening cloud upon their horizon. In what way it does this, however, is not entirely clear, and this is in part because of the divergent range of signified which this signifier appears to indicate, whether it be state power, that related to the production of ideas, or the even vaguer threatening force to which Giussani at times alludes. Little enough detail is provided that it is frequently difficult to be certain what it is that he is referring to and by what processes he believes it to be exercised, if indeed there is an exerciser to speak of. Given that what Giussani presents in *The Religious Sense* is a methodology for knowing and thus for liberation, it is no small problem that power, apparently a significant contributor to the alienating circumstances under which we labour, receives such a passing treatment, with indeterminate allusion found sufficient where a reasonably substantial analysis is called for.

Giussani's ill-defined depiction of our surroundings, populated with a number of problematically vague themes or concepts, is particularly striking given his recognition of the importance of culture, of the Church's retreat from it, and of its hold upon our epistemological processes and our very language. For all of this, the workings of culture receive very little attention, leaving a great deal of guess work to be done. One may feel for example that Giussani's work forms a confrontation of sorts with liberalism, and I would argue that it does; however, his disinclination for such specifics makes this uncertain, and the work of de-alienation is not assisted by this treatment.

I have suggested that the dialogical origins of Giussani's texts may be at the root of some of these problems. An off-the-cuff inception could provide some explanation for his common use of a single ambiguous term in several disparate applications, all without accompanying clarification, but I also have something else in mind. Giussani's written

work arose out of discussions with those around him, often groups of students, whose problems he sought to address. Those dialogues would have built a substantial framework of language-in-common, a set of referents whose signifiers need not be expanded on because of that shared experience. It seems likely that many of the terms which I and other readers of Giussani have found unclear in their intended meaning might stem from those meetings where the issue at hand would be understood based on that commonly held experience. Transposed to the written text and away from that earlier audience, these signifiers become problematic, for there is no longer that same framework shared by writer and reader. It is an argument that seems probable enough, and it is suggestive of further projects that might explore the effects of those dialogical beginnings on the texts in their present form.

Another direction one might proceed in exploring the blank spaces left in Giussani's exposition would be to consider the impact of the Second Vatican Council on his work. Vatican II is recognized as representing, in documents such as *Gaudium et Spes*, a set of statements on the Catholic Church's position with regard to society, modernity, and liberalism that has been hugely influential in shaping the responses, whether in agreement or not, of Catholic thinkers ever since. An analysis of the details of the Second Vatican Council, and of its impact on the relevant discourses and on Giussani himself is well beyond the resources of this paper but could produce interesting results. Giussani has certainly demonstrated a willingness to break with the Church's views on certain issues, and it might be worthwhile to examine his writing as a response to the council.

There is a great deal to be recommended in Giussani's published thought: his critique of the fate of reason, his proposal for a practicable epistemological methodology that acknowledges our historically contingent nature but retains an objective conception of truth and of reality, his celebration of the everyday that finds importance in the thoughts and activities that take place there, his emphasis upon education and the development of the human person, his regard for the young, his sensitivity to the ways in which our language and concepts are often abused, his insistence on grounding his work in the problems he witnessed around him. Giussani attempted to convey his ideas in a way that required no theological degree to comprehend and could be immediately turned upon the world of his readers in a very practical way. However, in this last goal, I

have argued, he fell short of his aim. Vagaries undermined his intentions, and absent analyses prevented a richer exposition of the cultural world that he was so inspired to engage with. While still highly valuable, his project then seems incomplete when measured against all that he intended and all that it could be.

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