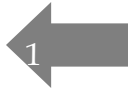


2018 Fall School of Community



Why the Church, Chapter 9 (pp.203-209)

Week	Schedule	Pages
11/19	1. What the Church Demands as the Criterion of Judgment <i>LGG: Why the Church? The claim endures.</i>	203-206 799-803
11/26	2. On the Use of a Criterion of Judgment... <i>LGG: A real event in the life of humanity</i>	206-207 803-806
12/03	3. Openness of Heart <i>LGG: People Cannot learn unless they encounter.</i>	207-209 794-795
12/10	Judgment <i>LGG: Courtesans of history</i>	203-209 795-797

Chapter 9: The Locus of Verification: Human Experience

Is the Church (with all its many failings) truly the prolongation of Christ? What can make the Church credible before our eyes and the eyes of others?

The Christian message announces the permanence of the fact of Christ, as a continuous happening – not something that happened once – but as something that still happens in the Church, which is the people of God from the social point of view and the Body of Christ from the ontological point of view. We should not be scandalized by the faults the Church will always be found to have. Yet, amid all the filth, one must seek the pure gold of truth.

To find the pure gold of the new creature reborn in grace, we must come to terms with our critterion of judgement. As a matter of fact, the Church entrusts itself to the judgement of our experience and, indeed, it constantly urges that experience walk its path in completeness. We must compare everything with the bundle of profound needs which constitute the core of our true “I,” a core uncensored by outside intervention.

The Church also believes that the answer it presents to the needs of the human heart will be unforeseeably and incomparably greater and truer than the fruit of any other hypothesis. The Church repeats with Jesus that it can be recognized as credible because of its correspondence to man’s elementary needs, to man’s supreme yearning to fulfillment without censoring anything.

God’s pedagogy has never shield away from a critical approach. “God asked the prophets to believe him because he affected verifiable demonstrations of all that he said [...] This type of demonstration is what the Bible calls signs. God gives signs and asks that these signs be read, interpreted and understood. God does not ask the people to believe just any prophet. On the contrary, he provides them with a rule of discernment for distinguishing the false from the true prophet – he whose words come true in history.”

To verify such a far-reaching claim, we must have as starting point an “encounter,” a physical presence. The Church is this physical presence. The Church cannot cheat in making its proposal. It cannot just hand over a book. It must offer life, and it must enfold the experience of men deep within the embrace of its claim.

Neither can man attempt to make such a portentous verification without a commitment that engages his entire life, without first being willing to make a commitment. If the Church cannot cheat, then neither can man. Man’s prospect is true journeying, but his heart must be willing.

Why the Church? The Claim Endures

Life of Luigi Giussani, pp. 799-803

“How can those who encounter Jesus Christ a day, a month, a hundred, a thousand, or two thousand years after his disappearance from earthly horizons, be enabled to realize that he corresponds to the truth which he claims? In other words, how does one come to see whether Jesus of Nazareth is or is not in a strict sense that event that incarnates the hypothesis of revelation?” Giussani dedicated an entire book to this question, which he said lay at the core of what has historically been called “Church.” The book was published in two volumes, the first of which appeared in May of 1990. It was the third volume of the so-called PerCorso, following *The Religious Sense* (1986) and *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* (1988). Thus the series with which Jaca Book gave a printed form to Giussani’s journey of thought and experience, which he developed first through teaching at Berchet High School and then at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (where he had, for years, used an outline on the Church, which was distributed to students in the form of course materials), headed towards its conclusion. The new book was called *Perché la Chiesa: La pretesa permane* (Why the Church: The claim endures).

Giussani explains its contents in the book’s opening pages: “The word ‘Church’ indicates an historical phenomenon whose only meaning lies in the fact that it enables man to attain a certainty about Christ. It is, in short, the answer to this question: ‘How can I, who arrived the day after Christ left, know that this really is Something of supreme interest to me, and how can I know this with any reasonable degree of certainty?’” According to Giussani it is impossible to imagine a more crucial issue for people than this, both for their lives and for the life of the world. Of course, “the question could obviously be censored, but considering the nature of the question, that would be like saying ‘no.’” Giussani wrote that the important thing was for contemporary people, who came after, “a long time after” the event of Jesus of Nazareth, may draw near to him today in such a way as to arrive at a reasonable and certain evaluation.” The Church proposes itself as the answer to this need.

Retracing the ground covered in the two preceding books, Giussani wrote that if “we do not make a commitment to that inevitable and omnipresent aspect of life which is the religious sense [with reference to the first volume], if we think that we have the option not to assume a personal position concerning the historical fact of Christ [referring to the second volume], then the interest that the Church has for our lives will only be reduced to the level of [a] sociological or political problem or a problem of association to be fought for or defended according to these various points of view.” But on the contrary, “it is a fact that, whether we like it or not, whether we resist or come to terms with it, the

annunciation of God made man runs right through the entire course of history.” Therefore, he says, it is worthwhile to come to terms with it, because failing to do so is to risk stripping reason “of an authentic and living religious sense, the one aspect that makes its connective capacity more human and fulfilled!” His reflections fundamentally presuppose that the Church “is not just an expression of life [or] something born from life, it is a life.” This means that “[a]nyone seeking to verify a personal opinion of the Church must keep in mind that any real understanding of a life [like the Church] requires that one share that life in a way that lets him or her know it.”

In light of this, we may note that the entire first part of the book is dedicated to “laying bare the hidden folds that the history of man’s conscience has formed in the face of the problem we are tackling here.” Giussani identifies three such folds.

The first of these hidden folds he called “the rationalistic attitude.” This approach says that “Jesus Christ is a fact of the past, just like Napoleon and Julius Caesar,” who can be investigated through the study of documents and historical sources. But “what emerges when we have put all of these studies together is, hundreds of different interpretations. [. . .] Christ would remain, in the final analysis, someone unknown to us.” In this sense, historical-critical rationalism “diminishes the content of the Christian message even before taking it into consideration,” “[t]he Christian message [being] that God has made himself a human, carnal presence in history. For 2,000 years, the history of humanity has transmitted to us the voices of men, women, and children, undistinguished by sex, age, social position, or cultural formation; they are voices that ask, like the angels in Luke’s account on the morning of the resurrection, ‘Why look among the dead for someone who is alive?’ (Luke 24: 5).”

The second secret fold is what Giussani calls the “Protestant attitude:” it is a “profoundly religious attitude, and as such, has a clear perception of the interminable distance between man and God.” But precisely because of the perception of this distance, it raises the problem of that it becomes absolutely impossible for men and women to reach any degree of certainty about the announcement of God who became man. “Man is powerless to do this, since this presence is destined to remain a mystery. [According to the Protestant attitude i]t is the spirit of God itself which enlightens the heart, and inspiring it, makes one ‘feel’ the truth of the person of Jesus.” The way to reach the distant Christ, “which the great theologian Karl Barth called ‘contact by tangent,’” becomes “an interior, direct relationship with the Spirit, an interior encounter.” But this model leads into subjectivism, which is open to two major risks: first, “how can one determine whether what one ‘feels’ is the result of the Spirit’s influence or the idealization of one’s own thoughts?” Second, the Protestant attitude “gives rise to an infinite number of interpretations, different solutions, to an inevitable muddling of theories.” But the real

objection against this approach, he wrote, is “that it does not respect the facts of the Christian message, its original connotations: one who is divine became man, a man who ate, drank, slept, a man one could meet on the street. [. . .] This is to say, the Christian message is a wholly human fact according to all the factors of human reality, factors interior and exterior, subjective and objective. The Protestant attitude annuls this wholeness, reducing the Christian experience to a merely interior experience.”

According to Giussani, the third approach is the most adequate and reasonable way for a contemporary person to reach certainty about Christ. He calls it “The Orthodox-Catholic view” because “Orthodoxy and Catholicism share the same vision. This attitude is the realization of the whole tradition, [and] is consistent with the structure of the Christian event as it presented itself in history.” How did this approach present itself in history? As a “wholly human presence,” which implies the method of the encounter, of bumping into a presence outside oneself. This certainly happened to those who met Jesus 2,000 years ago — but now? Giussani stressed:

[E] ven when Jesus was at the height of his earthly activity, the event that he was assumed an identifiable form that was not merely his external, physical appearance, but also that of those who believed in him; so much so that they were sent by him to convey his words— his message— to reproduce his prodigious acts, to bring the salvation that his person was. The so-named Orthodox-Catholic approach shows us this method for reaching Jesus Christ even today, so that we can verify whether his great claim is real or not, whether he is God or not, whether the Christian message is true or not. This method is the chance encounter with a reality comprised of those who believe in him. For the presence of Christ in history— the visible appearance— visibly abides in the unity of believers, which is encounterable form of his presence.

It is “the truth become flesh, a God made presence, who even after 70, 100, or 2,000 years reaches you through a reality that you can see, touch, and feel. This is the company of believers in him.”

After a historical excursions covering from the middle age to the twentieth century, Giussani went through the constitutive factors of the Christian phenomenon, intending to highlight the causes of the difficulty modern people have in understanding the meaning of the Christian words (including in light of the reflections laid out in *La coscienza religiosa nell'uomo moderno* [Religious awareness in modern man] in 1985 [see page 658]): “The Church presents itself in history as the relationship with the living Christ,” and therefore, “The reality of a sociologically identifiable community” which he described with the image of the first Christians gathering together in the Portico of Salomon, as described in the Acts of the Apostles:

Try then to imagine the scene: it is around the Paschal season, when Jews throughout the world would be intent, as far as possible, on travelling to Jerusalem as pilgrims. Try also to imagine the reactions of one of these pilgrim, who, on going to the temple for a few days in a row, would have noticed, each time, a little group of people under the portico. The first day he would have proceeded on his way, without wondering why, and on the second day, he might have done the same. But at some point, he certainly would have asked someone, “Who are those people I always see together here?” And they would have replied, “They are the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.” And

so we can see how the Church began: it literally allowed itself to “be seen” under Solomon’s portico, it proposed itself through the mere sight of it, through a first perception which can only be described as community.

That community recognized itself as “invested by a ‘Strength from on High.’” The first Christians “felt they were personalities in the world, in society, personalities who were different – different because of their conception of self and their ability to communicate.” The kind of life they lived was characterized by a “common interest [. . .], koinonia in Greek and communio in Latin.” “What did they share that made them conscious of joint ownership? [. . .] a single reason for living, the reason for living – Jesus Christ.”

These are the terms in which Giussani described the Church, which had emerged in the first centuries: “[W]ithin such a banal, [wretched] human reality, there was the certainty of a new humanity, the humanity of Christ capable of transforming any kind of miserable humanity, providing it runs the ‘race’ the apostle described, providing it sets out on a journey, according to its own possibilities, but supported by grace.” Indeed, since the very beginning, the Church had been sustained by this certainty: “Christ can [victoriously] cut through all our powerlessness with his strength and can transform it into an energy that works for the good.”

A Real Event in the Life of Humanity

Life of Luigi Giussani, pp.803-806

A real event in the life of humanity The topic of Christ's presence in history had always dominated Giussani's thought on the nature of Christianity. It came up again during the CL university student Equipe that took place in Bruzzano (Milan) on 29 May 1990. The Equipe nearly overlapped with the publication of *Why the Church?* Giussani spoke about the book in reference to the tensions that were broiling within Italian universities at the time: an ultra-left "Pantera" student movement of moderate proportions, which was greatly amplified in the press, as Onorato Grassi recalls: "There were sparse, little groups, tied to the social centres, that occupied departments, made declarations, and threatened retaliatory or disruptive action, opportunistically put under the magnifying lenses of the media. [. . .] For a few months the 'struggle that doesn't pay but entertains,' the obsessive repetition of slogans and abstract demands, and the 'camp-out' in the courtyards tainted the atmosphere in the universities. Some of them tried to take issue with the Catholic presence, the only student presence left after the dissipation of all the leftist organizations." The CL university students found themselves put to the test concerning the meaning of their presence "within necessities and normal, daily relationships. In our classes, with our professors, in our involvement with the Cattolici Popolari in the university student government, in conversations about ideas for reform, and in our involvement with the CUSL to help students with their studies and find housing for students from out of town."

In this context, Giussani invited the students to recognize that "[o]ur proposal, what we put forward to the world, is this extremely simple message [. . .]: God became man and is here present. He is present here and now; He is a presence. [. . .] His presence implies a material reality. The message of the angel ('He will be called Emmanuel, God with you') implied flesh. His presence—'I will always be with you, until the end of the world'—implies flesh, implies matter, our flesh. Therefore, it is something that occupies a time and a space, it is a subject in time and space." He concluded, "[W]hat my being conveys, what it brings into the world, is this message: He is presence, here and now, and, therefore, He corresponds to a present, physical reality. He is a human presence, and, therefore, corresponds to (is revealable, reachable, visible, tangible, audible as) a present, physical reality." The following August, Giussani delved more deeply into the topic of Christian presence when he spoke at the Equipe in Arabba (Belluno). Carmine Di Martino remembers: "A transcript was published as an insert in *Il Sabato*, in the form of a little book entitled *Promessa compiuta, non menzogna* ["Not a lie, a promise fulfilled"]. It became a working tool for the university students (and the movement in general) for that entire year. Father Giussani considered it to be so important that he didn't want anything

else to be circulated.” He would say as much at the following Equipe: “The only reading should be the one from August’s Equipe. This summer I said that we have to spend the whole year working on that text, because at first it seems like you understand it, but then the second time you read it you see that you hadn’t actually understood it.” But why? What was so important about it? The introduction serves to explain.

The talk came at a time in which Giussani was focusing heavily on “history’s real protagonist [. . .]: the subject, the person, that is, you and me.” During the open assembly in Arabba he emphasized, “Let’s help one another to be human. You aren’t human in a collective sense. [. . .] The issue is the individual; the issue is the person. The issue is you.” The lesson that followed focused entirely on the relationship between the person and presence: “Since the 1976 Equipe, which was called From utopia to presence [here, see page 479] we have followed a course that is pushing us now to break through and strip down the word presence: we need to break through it and strip it down. Because [it’s true that] the CUSL [University Cooperative for Work and Study] is presence; the welcome table for incoming freshman is presence; School of Community is presence; the testimony we have given is presence, but we have to strip presence of all this expressiveness. Because presence is in the person, solely and exclusively in the person, in you. Presence is a topic that overlaps with your self. Presence comes from and consists in the person. We’ve told ourselves this a thousand times!”

But what was the substance of the person in an age that had rendered it so fragile and fleeting, buffeted by trends and dominant opinion? “What defines the person as the actor and protagonist of a presence is clarity of faith, [. . .] because faith is the ultimate aspect of intelligence. It is intelligence that reaches ultimate horizons and identifies one’s destiny.” But if this “intelligence” recognizes the ultimate horizons and reaches out to touch them, Giussani went on, “it is only because of something that happened, something that happened inside us, through a word or a message— an announcement.” He immediately added, “We have to recognize that, if this is true of each of us, it is because we have been called, elected, chosen. The supreme and determinative event of human existence [. . .] is an event called Baptism.” Giussani knew he was using a familiar word, one the students surely took for granted, and he set out to expose their lack of awareness: “Nothing is further from the hierarchy of values, of interests, of praise, of tastes, and of the crowding desires that encumber your lives than the word Baptism.” Di Martino recalls, “It goes without saying that not only were the students with Catholic backgrounds shocked, but all the others, too. Deep down, for all of them, baptism was underappreciated.”

Perceiving this, Giussani went on: “An event has happened in our lives— an event! A real event: we call it encounter. But this encounter is like the flowering of a root. The thing

called Baptism happened – the encounter that Christ made with our flesh: He has taken our flesh and carried it in His.” So Baptism and encounter were two events: an “initial” one and a “concluding” one.

In the second point of the lesson, Giussani went to the core of this human issue, saying that the real event could only be recognized in all its significance by entering into relationship with it: “If we don’t take this fully into account, everything else becomes blurred. It blurs into pietism, or a set of liturgical preferences, or scriptural analysis.” To get his point across, Giussani drew from the book of Wisdom: “God did not create death and does not take pleasure in the destruction of the living. He created everything for existence. The creatures of the world are healthy, there is no venom of death in them, nor does the netherworld reign over the earth, because justice is immortal.” But how did this positive statement square up with everything happening at the university and the world? Giussani provided a peremptory answer to the question: “Without Christ, this would not be true, because contradiction destroys everything one has imagined and built, and plunges everything into the vortex of death. Without Christ, these words from the Bible cannot make sense. Without Christ, it’s not true; it would be an optimistic expression of Greek thought. It would be useless, or better, cynical, because it would contrast in such a morbidly sharp way with reality. [Or] it would remain a utopia: a Jewish utopia. These are the two, bitter kinds of hope that dominate the culture of the world: optimism and utopia.”

For Giussani, Christ was not a thought or a figment of the imagination, but a real event in the life of humankind. Philosophers and poets had grasped this, as Giussani pointed out using an expression from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein: “Christianity is not a doctrine; it is not a theory of what was and what will be of the human soul. Rather, it is the description of a real event in the life of man.” With these words, Giussani said, Wittgenstein had captured the essence of Christianity, as had the poet Cesare Pavese when he wrote: “In planned things the element of inevitability is always missing. The most resolute thought is nothing compared with what actually happens.”

After a discussion on the contents of the lesson, Giussani offered a summary: “Yesterday’s entire lesson can be summed up in these two points. The first refers to the passage from Wisdom: God made humanity for life; this would be a lie if Christ did not exist. The second is that, as a result of this, the new event in life is Christ, because he gives a reason for living.” But all of this, he added quickly, “must become a personal experience.” And this was “the work of living.” So, “there is only one issue: the blade of freedom, recognizing Christ,” is that each person repeat, along with the last words of the book of the Apocalypse, “Come, Lord.” This means that each person should seek Christ

with a sincere heart. "A personality that becomes presence is one that begins to ask with a sincere heart."

Giussani concluded by pointing out the channel for the journey of personalization, for the work of living: "From Adam on, everything that reveals the work of God, everything that reveals God's plan with man in the world, takes as its supreme category the person in the mist of the people, the person in communion, the person-in-communion. That is why he chose Abraham for a task and made him into a people. He chooses you in Baptism and he makes you a people, Church – His Church." Therefore, "the most important thing is faithfulness to what you have met, not as a theory, but as an event. Faithfulness, that is, to the companionship. The greatest crime is not betraying, underestimating, or being inconsistent about what you have seen, about the truth. The greatest crime is the betrayal or abandonment of the reality in which the truth has been communicated to you. It is betraying the company, betraying the event, not betraying a bunch of words, even if they are theoretically illuminating."

“People cannot learn unless they encounter”

Life of Luigi Giussani, pp.794-795

Giussani's thoughts on the nature of Christianity came up again at the CL Beginning Day in Milan on September 24, 1989. Drawing on a line from Oscar Wilde—“Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught”—Giussani stressed that “the person is a living awareness, a living affectivity: people cannot learn unless they encounter.” The most serious danger for Christian life and the Christian people of today, he said, was a moralistic reduction of faith. He pointed out that Saint Augustine had long ago written, “The hidden and terrible poison of your error is this: the desire that the grace of Christ lie in his example and not in the gift of his person.” The modality of this presence, Giussani commented, “was chosen by Him, and in it he included my body and yours, my mundanity and yours, my smallness and yours, my ephemerality and yours.” But “people who think social, political, and economic power is everything talk about Christianity as ‘moral values,’ to eliminate the reality of a presence that makes those moral values real and active.”

The firestorm of media debate that began in August 1989 did not die down, and on 29 September L'Osservatore Romano ran a press release it had received from CL: “The National Council of Communion and Liberation, in light of recent turmoil stirred up among Catholics by the viewpoints and methods of the weekly newspaper *Il Sabato*, and in order to best protect the freedom of the movement and safeguard its nature as a strictly ecclesial movement, has urged its members involved in the ownership of the paper to relinquish their involvement. Communion and Liberation reiterates, as strongly as ever, that the movement takes no responsibility whatsoever for the opinions, the contents, and the chosen wording of *Il Sabato*.”

A few days later, on 2 October 1989, Giussani wrote a letter to the members of the CL Fraternity explaining the meaning of the release, which had been interpreted by the mass media as disowning the paper and its editors.

[The press release about Il Sabato]— emphasized for reasons extraneous to our intentions— aimed at stressing the fact that the responsibility for the individual works lies solely and exclusively with the adults who do them. Even if they are inspired by the experience of faith of the Fraternity, their achievements can be evaluated in various ways. We shall always view these attempts, properly undertaken, with the criteria of faith and the affection of charity. For many people do not understand what remains fundamental in our experience: that faith cannot but invest all of human interests, in different ways suggesting, correcting, determining. [. . .] Faith safeguards the whole of human experience [. . .]. Allow me to repeat, my friends, that at this terrible period in history, where everything seems confused and used instrumentally by those in power, the only hope the Movement has of being a help to the Holy Church is its unity. Let us ask the Holy Spirit, through Mary, for the courage, intelligence, and effectiveness of such a unity.

His concern for unity also spurred Giussani to write a letter to Paolo Liguori, the new editor of *Il Sabato*. The paper published the letter on 11 November 1989. “Esteemed Editor [Liguori], while I admire the understanding and ability you have shown in managing the difficult inheritance of *Il Sabato*, allow me to share with you my serious misgivings about the three articles covering the Rome matter.” These contained, among other things, criticism of Cardinal Ugo Poletti, papal vicar for the Rome Diocese and president of the Italian Bishops Conference, because of his opinions on the Roman elections.

In the relationship among Christians, and particularly when it comes to Church authorities, a level of discretion and devotion are required that is suitable to the relationship between children and a father. This implies vigilance when it comes to the choice of both subject and mode of expression, which, in this case for example, could have led a self-declared Christian journalist to focus on things that are undoubtedly positive, like the inestimable value of the call for unity put out by Cardinal Poletti (a person to whom, it bears noting, we owe a great debt of gratitude). This would have made the journalists themselves more alert to the negative and accusatory exaggerations of the press and the network of associations hostile to our presence. Therefore, I hope that the occasion will serve to foster ever greater sensitivity of leadership and balance in the Church in our society, which you and I surely love helping to save from confusion.

Courtesans of history

Life of Luigi Giussani, pp.795-797

Giussani's concern for the Church resurfaced at the university student Equipe on 10 February 1990. One of the students asked Giussani to explain a line from philosopher Andrea Emo, which Giussani had quoted some months earlier: "For centuries, the Church was history's protagonist. Then it assumed the no less glorious role of history's antagonist. Today it is merely history's courtesan." Giussani said, "To be 'courtesans of history' means living in history without the kind of creative contribution, capable of becoming proposal and construction, which belongs to those who have self-awareness, who have a personality, and, therefore, have a sense of the purpose of everything." Because of this, such people "have an awareness of their task in the passing moment, in the historical contingency. And also, therefore, a generosity – an affection for the purpose that gives them generosity at that moment." But the Church itself could never be history's courtesan, "because its entire being, notwithstanding any number of betrayals by its children or its leaders, is awareness of the Mystery, of the Father who is revealed in the Son." The Church was made up of people, and was "full of the pain of human need, which addresses the emotional impulse of charity according to its clarity of awareness: therefore, wherever it is free, the human is better off, the sick human is better, the pilgrim, the wandering human is better off."

Those days were marked by weeks of student protests in the universities, and one student brought up a phrase written on a wall in his occupied department: "The most terrifying thing is normality." He contrasted it with a line from theologian Romano Guardini, often quoted by Giussani: "In the experience of a great love [. . .] everything that happens becomes an event within its ambit." In response Giussani declared, "The greatest thing is normality [because] the step that brings you nearer to destiny is within normality. And if you are aware of destiny, then everything becomes great with the greatness communicated by destiny. [. . .] But what is it that's true about those words written on the wall? That people aren't made for the banal. They're not made for boredom [. . .] and meaninglessness. People are made for a meaning. If the meaning is clear, if destiny is clear, then every step that leads toward it is great and marked with a sense of adventure. Then nothing is without meaning anymore, nothing is small. There is nothing small in the sense of useless, because everything leads to great love." He went on: "People resign themselves to smallness only when they see it as a step and tool for greatness." The present, which would in itself be "banal (banal is the same as saying useless) and a source of boredom, instead becomes a great thing because it is made to flow [. . .] towards destiny, towards the mouth of the river. [. . .] And the water stays pure and clear [. . .], while water that does not flow towards the mouth stagnates and becomes fetid. This

fetidness is the normality your companions were thinking of when they wrote, 'It's intolerable.' [. . .] If everything converges in one, then it has to fall into order. Disorder happens when there is no 'one' towards which to go, no 'one' as a function of which to go."

On the eve of Holy Week, 3 April 1990, Giussani wrote a letter to the entire fraternity: "We live in a time when the Christian ideal is exteriorized and degraded to 'social values' or 'common values,' totally at the mercy of our voluntarism. [. . .], In order to be 'good' – to bring about continually the change of our hearts [. . .] – we know very well that a miracle is needed, the miracle of Christ's goodness toward us, or 'Grace.' Only through the goodness that wells up from Christ's grace can the love among us and the social values overcome every misunderstanding." Giussani reminded everyone of the reason for his certainty: "Attention to the pope's every word, always heard in the overall context of His teaching, and lived in faithful love for His great figure as a lover of Christ, as well as His representative on earth."

On the occasion of John Paul II's seventieth birthday, on 18 May 1990, Giussani wrote to the pope: "With all our heart, vibrating because of your witness in Mexico, we say 'Alleluia!' for the grace of your birth and the miracle of your life."