

“Is our companionship for everybody? Even for your classmates?”

“TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE”

18. Universality

by Luigi Giussani*

The very nature of Christian action, that is, to share, unquestionably demonstrates its boundless domain: a commitment to a genuine experience of charity signifies a complete openness towards the universe. All limitations to the breadth of our existence imposed from within suppress love. Love is not a matter of taste or measure, nor is it some intelligent plan of ours. It is a humble clinging to being as it offers itself to us. Hence the essential characteristic and the ultimate test of the Christian existence is its boundless openness, that is, its universality.

Even an authentically human attitude necessarily reaches out to everyone because humanity inevitably belongs to everyone. Attention to one’s own experience is not authentic if separated—even unwittingly—from everyone else’s experience. However, the clarity of a universal perspective and the energy to follow it in practice are more a gift than a conquest, more an encounter than a personal brilliance or intelligence: they are the fruit of the Spirit.

And so we understand why the first action of the apostles after Pentecost, Peter’s speech to the Hebrews, bears witness to such a spirited and unambiguous devotion to a boundless ideal. The Church came of age as soon as the Lord’s command, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,”¹ became an overwhelming and concrete reality through the Gift of the Spirit. Indeed we move from childhood into adulthood only when we begin to walk towards the universal.

A particularly human act, a fruitful work, is realized, for at last it has been brought back to its original dimensions.

No existence that does not emulate this simple openness to the universe is Christian. This openness does not manifest itself in an impossible contempt of, or inhumane disinterest for, the particular, but in the way in which the detail is lived. We may commit and genuinely dedicate ourselves to family or friendship, class or school, studies or profession, but the *motive behind the commitment* must transcend any particular desire for a higher mark or attachment to a particular person. It must not dwell on detail, however important. It is easy to enjoy or justify becoming involved with our immediate surroundings; however, any choice that has no other motivation but itself is only inflated selfishness, misguided sentimentality. Unfortunately, the modern attitude eloquently affirms—even in the pompous lies of its »

¹ Matthew 28:19.

* Source: *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2006, pp. 81-82.

» boastful universalisms—its incapacity to venture beyond a limited perspective, and soon proves itself utterly incapable of fidelity to the particular, which becomes perceived as petty and as narrow as a prison.

On the contrary, only the confident freedom of a Christian existence, its vigilant detachment from all particularism, its resolute readiness for any authentic freshness constitutes a sure promise, a prophecy of the coming of the Kingdom.

See what days are coming—it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks—
days when I will bring famine on the country,
a famine not of bread, a drought not of water,
but of hearing the word of Yahweh.
They will stagger from sea to sea,
wander from north to east,
seeking the word of Yahweh
and failing to find it.
That day, delicate girl and stalwart youth shall faint from thirst.²

² Amos 8:11–13.