

Luigi Giussani, *La verità nasce dalla carne*, BUR, Milano 2019
Excerpts from the Foreword by Julián Carrón

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The Mystery of God Who Was a Baby

In Fr. Giussani's thought, everything turns on Jesus' incarnation

by Julián Carrón

“What is Christianity, if not the event of a new man who by his nature becomes a new protagonist on the scene of the world?” These words, pronounced in October of 1987, are a good synthesis of the way Fr. Luigi Giussani thought of the nature of Christianity.

He had a chance to reiterate this in December of that year, when he traveled to Extremadura to spend the days between Christmas and New Year's with some Spanish friends: “The origin is the mystery of how the person of Christ was communicated to the human person, to the person.” But this event is not truly realized unless it penetrates the one to whom the communication is directed. Therefore, Giussani underlined that, “the time of personalization has come.” What kind of personalization did he intend? “Of the new event come into the world, of the factor of a new protagonism in history, which is Christ, in communion with those that the Father has given to Him.” The Christian announcement, then, can only permeate the fiber of humanity if it becomes a personal experience.

In the years that followed, Fr. Giussani sought, in every way, to help all of us complete this personalization, without which Christianity would remain external to the ‘I,’ as history has repeatedly proven. “This is the horrible root of your error: you pretend to make Christ's gift consist in his example, whereas the gift is himself, his very Person,” St. Augustine admonished the Pelagians. Why? Because with a Christ reduced to a moral example, the gift that He is cannot penetrate the flesh and blood of daily life. Especially today, much more is needed to dislodge the heart from its torpor.

For Fr. Giussani, the Mystery is not at all vague or generic, because it is a “Mystery that enters history: God is a historical God,” to such an extent that a battle breaks out surrounding this announcement. “This is intolerable for the human culture of every age. Many have come to the idea, to the intuition that reality depends on something ‘other,’ even Voltaire, even the people most hostile to the Church and to Christianity. But that this Mystery had something to do with history, that God became a historical God, that cannot easily be tolerated, because it is inconceivable how the Mystery could be alongside and within the misery of time and space, the misery that we feel within and that carries us from the uncertainty of morning to the tiredness of evening, that leads us to live most of the moments of our lives in total mundanity, that leads us to spend our energy on such typically petty attitudes.”

Fr. Giussani's words are absolutely concrete: “Try to conceive of it: God, the Mystery that makes all things, became man in the womb of a girl; He was born, He was a baby. If you really pay attention, it is not just because of my personality that I feel goosebumps, because it is something out of this world. And, in fact, the world's crime, the crime of *our* world as well, is using these as merely words, is still perceiving them as outside of us, strange words, though perhaps accepted with devotion.”

To underline the dramatic nature of the situation, Giussani goes back to an image he wanted to place before everyone in the Easter Poster for 1988, with the quote from *A Short Story of the Anti-Christ* by Solovyov: “Everyone, in fact, has some love or respect for Christianity, for the Church. Because of this, the Emperor benevolently offers Christians the task of acting as the spiritual authority for the good of the whole world; in other words, being an enabling factor for the shared values necessary to the life of society. The response the old *starets* gave was clear, ‘Great sovereign! The thing we value most in Christianity is Christ Himself – He in his person. All the rest comes from Him, for we know that in Him dwells bodily the fullness of Divinity!’ What we hold most dear is God

made man!”

What a difference there is when you run into the authentic Christian experience of people in whom this personalization has happened! “There is a reality within the world, one that has touched our flesh and bones in Baptism, one that can be seen and heard, one that penetrates time, creating a flux, a people without end to which all men and women are called; there is a reality that is God made man. Humanity is made for this Man who is among us.”

How does this happen? You can only escape from the reduction of Christ to a moral example by means of grace, as Camus reminds us: “It is not with scruples that a man will become great. Greatness comes about, God willing, like a beautiful day.” We think of Pope Francis, who never tires of reminding us of the original nature of Christianity: “This is the first truth about the Christian life. It is not simply a list of external prescriptions to fulfil or a set of teachings to know. The Christian life, first and foremost, is not this; rather, it is the knowledge that, in Jesus, we are the Father’s beloved children. It means wanting to live life as a love story, the story of God’s faithful love, He who never abandons us.”