

“GENERATING TRACES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD”

5. The Event Goes on in History (the Temple in Time)

by Luigi Giussani*

The testimony of Mikel Azurmendi has shown us that Christian experience is the “surprise at a person” entering one’s own life. Such a surprise, a totally unconditional encounter, does not make you passive, but asks to be welcomed. Only by patiently making room for it, can man realize the good and joy it conveys, as main “source of zest for life.” Thus, the initial surprise, over time, becomes admiration and deep sympathy.

We here reproduce the text we shall work on until the start of the Christmas holidays, taken from the book by L. Giussani–S. Alberto–J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010 (pp. 56–70).

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6. A NEW MORALITY

To speak of the new understanding of reality, introducing the concept of *affectus*, means to reach the threshold of the moral problem. New knowledge and new morality have the same origin. For Simon, son of John, and for Paul, the origin of the new knowledge is identical to the origin of their new morality—a present Event.

Out of one’s belonging to the companionship of Christ a new conception of the moral problem is born. In the confusion, the dark loneliness, and the whirling violence that dominate our world today, everyone speaks of morality, but the problem never emerges in its truth. A man’s act is moral when it takes account of the whole. An act is true, moral, only if it corresponds to the overall plan; if it leaves out some part, then it is no longer moral. It is analogous to the dynamism of reason. Reason is awareness of reality according to all its factors; if it leaves out just one of them, then it is no longer reason, but falsehood. Analogously, an act is moral when it maintains its original openness to reality with which God continuously creates us.

The corruption of morality that is particularly fashionable these days is called moralism. Moralism is the unilateral choice of values to justify one’s own view of things. Normally people understand that without a certain order one cannot conceive of life, reality, or ex- »

* Source: L. Giussani - S. Alberto - J. Prades,
Generating Traces in the History of the World,
McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2010, pp. 56-70.

» istence. But how do they define this order? Considering reality according to the various points of view they start from, they describe it in its stable dynamics and draw up a list of principles and laws, the fulfillment of which, they believe, will create order. In this way, age after age, the various analytical propositions in which human reflection outlines its claims take shape: "You have to do this and that." The Pharisees defined order with a seemingly endless number of laws. From a certain point of view the Pharisee is a man who likes order; the defender of morality understood as that order affirmed and outlined in all its details as far as humanly possible.

Moralism has two grave symptoms. The first is pharisaism. No one is more contrary to the Gospel than someone who considers himself honest,⁹⁸ because he has no need of Christ. The Pharisee lives without any tension, because he himself establishes the measure of what is right and he identifies it with what he thinks he is capable of. As a defence, he uses violence against anyone who is not like him. So the second symptom is readiness to lie. On the one hand he justifies himself, and on the other hand he hates and condemns his neighbour. But there is one further consequence of what we have said. There can be many different moralities, and the intentions that form them can all seem just in theory, but man is impotent before the ideals that he himself lays down as a path to follow on his journey.

Who is capable of morality? In his weakness, every man is a sinner. If we lack the awareness of being sinners we cannot approach anyone without injustice, presumption, pretension, aggression, calumny, and falsehood. Awareness of being sinners makes us capable of discretion, keen on the truth for ourselves and for others, hopeful that at least the other might be better than oneself, and humble. We cannot establish any true relationship unless we begin from the awareness of being sinners, of what we lack and of where we fail.

This is the point which Christ returned to insistently, as the prophets had done before him. What man can say, "I am obedient to all the laws"? One can say, "I acknowledge that these laws are necessary," but who keeps them all? Who can say, "I keep them all"? The Pharisee in the temple! But he is a Pharisee; the very meaning of the word has altered and become synonymous with impostor or hypocrite. Meanwhile at the back of the temple we find the poor tax-collector who admits he has gone against the law, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."⁹⁹

Coherence is a miracle, so true morality is a miracle. It is in faithfulness to the Christian companionship that, with time, a person finds himself becoming capable of things that he could never have imagined: "Yours, Lord, is the grace."¹⁰⁰

In the kingdom of God, there is no measure. "Let no-one judge, because only God is the judge."¹⁰¹ St Paul also says, "I judge no-one, not even myself."¹⁰² Only God measures all the factors of the man who acts, and his measure is beyond all measure—it is called mercy, something which for us is ultimately incomprehensible. As the man Jesus said of those who were killing him, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."¹⁰³ Christ built up their defence on the tiny margin of their ignorance. Our imitation of Christ is in the margin of mercy.

For this reason morality is striving, starting over and over again. Like a child who is learning to walk: he can fall ten times, but he keeps going towards his mother, he gets up and »

⁹⁸ Luke 18:9-14.

⁹⁹ See Luke 18:13.

¹⁰⁰ Psalm 62:12.

¹⁰¹ See Romans 14:10-13.

¹⁰² See 1 Corinthians 4:3.

¹⁰³ Luke 23:34.

» keeps going. Evil does not stop us. We can fall a thousand times, but evil does not define us, as it defines the present-day mentality, which has people ultimately justify what they cannot avoid doing. A characteristic of true morality, therefore, is the desire for correction. The term "correction" that translates the Latin "*regere cum*," to walk supporting each other.

A final symptom of morality as "tending to" is the absence of scandal. A Christian who lives the companionship is not scandalized at anything; he feels sorrow for evil, but is not scandalized.

How did this new morality enter the world? How did it appear?

"Simon, do you love me?"

The twenty-first chapter of John's Gospel is a fascinating documentation of the historical birth of the new ethic. The particular story narrated there is the keystone of the Christian conception of man, of his morality, in his relationship with God, with life, and with the world. The disciples were on their way back, at dawn, after a terrible night's fishing on the lake, in which they had caught nothing. As they approach the shore, they see a figure on the beach preparing a fire. Later they would notice that there were some fish on the fire collected for them, for their early-morning hunger. All of a sudden, John says to Peter, "That's the Lord!" They all open their eyes and Peter throws himself into the water, just as he is, and reaches the shore first. The others follow suit. They sit down in a circle in silence; no one speaks, because they all know it is the Lord. Sitting down to eat, they exchange a few words, but they are all fearful at the exceptional presence of Jesus, the Risen Jesus, who had already appeared to them at other times.

Simon, whose many errors had made him humbler than all the others, sat down, too, before the food prepared by the Master. He looks to see who is next to him and is terrified to see that it is Jesus Himself. He turns his gaze away from Him and sits there, all embarrassed. But Jesus speaks to him. Peter thinks in his heart, "My God, My God, what a dressing-down I deserve! Now he is going to ask me, 'Why did you betray me?'" The betrayal had been the last great error he had made, but, in spite of his familiarity with the Master, his whole life had been a stormy one, because of his impetuous character, his instinctive stubbornness, his tendency to act on impulse. He now saw himself in the light of all his defects. That betrayal had made him more aware of all his other errors, of the fact that he was worthless, weak, miserably weak. "Simon"—who knows how he must have trembled as that word sounded in his ears and touched his heart?—"Simon"—here he would have begun to turn his face towards Jesus—"do you love me?" Who on earth would have expected that question? Who would have expected those words?

Peter was a forty- or fifty-year-old man, with a wife and children, and yet he was such a child before the mystery of that companion he had met by chance! Imagine how he felt transfixed by that look that knew him through and through. "You will be called *Kefas*."¹⁰⁴ His tough character was described by that word "rock," and the last thing he had in mind was to imagine what the mystery of God and the mystery of that Man—the Son of God—had to do with that rock, to that rock. From the first encounter, He filled his whole mind, his whole heart. With that presence in his heart, with the continuous memory of Him, he looked at his wife and children, his work-mates, friends and strangers, individuals and crowds, he thought, and he fell asleep. That Man had become for him like an immense revelation, still to be clarified. »

¹⁰⁴ See John 1:42.

» “Simon, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord, I love You.” How could he say such thing after all he had done? That *yes* was an affirmation acknowledging a supreme excellence, an undeniable excellence, a sympathy that overwhelmed all others. Everything remained inscribed in that look. Coherence or incoherence seemed to fall into second place behind the faithfulness that felt like flesh of his flesh, behind the form of life which that encounter had moulded. In fact, no reproof came, only the echo of the same question: “Simon, do you love me?” Not uncertain, but fearful and trembling, he replied again, “Yes, I love You.” But the third time, the third time that Jesus threw the question at him, he had to ask confirmation from Jesus Himself: “Yes, Lord, You know I love You.” All my human preference is for You, all the preference of my mind, all the preference of my heart; You are the extreme preference of life, the supreme excellence of things. I don’t know, I don’t know how, I don’t know how to say it and I don’t know how it can be but, in spite of all I have done, in spite of all I can still do, I love You.

This *yes* is the birth of morality, the first breath of morality in the dry desert of instinct and pure reaction. Morality sinks its roots into this Simon’s *yes*, and this *yes* can take root in man’s soil only thanks to a dominant Presence, understood, accepted, embraced, served with all the energy of your heart; only in this way can man become a child again. Without a Presence, there is no moral act, there is no morality. But why is Simon’s *yes* to Jesus the birth of morality? Don’t the criteria of coherence and incoherence come first?

Peter had done just about all the wrong he could do, yet he lived a supreme sympathy for Christ. He understood that everything in him tended to Christ, that everything was gathered in those eyes, in that face, in that heart. His past sins could not amount to an objection, nor even the incoherence he could imagine for the future. Christ was the source, the place of his hope. Had someone objected to what he had done or what he might have done, Christ remained, through the gloom of those objections, the source of light for his hope. And he esteemed Him above everything else, from the first moment in which he had felt himself stared at by His eyes, looked on by Him. This is why he loved Him. “Yes, Lord, you know You are the object of my supreme sympathy, of my highest esteem.” This is how morality is born. The expression is very generic: “Yes, I love You.” But it is as generic as it is generative of a new life to be lived.

“Whoever has this hope in Him purifies himself as He is pure.”¹⁰⁵ Our hope is in Christ, in that Presence that, however distracted and forgetful we be, we can no longer (not completely anyway) remove from the earth of our heart because of the tradition through which He has reached us. It is in Him that I hope, before counting my errors and my virtues. Numbers have nothing to do with this. In the relationship with Him, numbers don’t count, the weight that is measured or measurable is irrelevant, and all the evil I can possibly do in the future has no relevance either. It cannot usurp the first place that this *yes* of Simon, repeated by me, has before the eyes of Christ. So a kind of flood comes from the depths of our heart, like a breath that rises from the breast and pervades the whole person, making it act, making it want to act more justly. The flower of the desire for justice, for true, genuine love, the desire to be capable of acting gratuitously, springs up from the depths of the heart. Just as our every move starts off not from an analysis of what the eyes see, but from an embrace of what the heart is waiting for, in the same way perfection is not the keeping of rules, but adhesion to a Presence.

Only the man who lives this hope in Christ lives the whole of his life in ascesis, in striving for good. And even when he is clearly contradictory, he desires the good. This always conquers, in the sense that it is the last word on himself, on his day, on what he does, on what »

¹⁰⁵ 1 John 3:3.

» he has done, on what he will do in the future. The man who lives this hope in Christ keeps on living in ascesis. Morality is a continual striving towards "perfection" that is born of an event that is a *sign* of a relationship with the divine, with the Mystery.

The ultimate reason for the yes

What is the true reason for the *yes* that Simon answers to Christ? Why does the *yes* said to Christ matter more than listing all your errors and the possible future errors that your weakness forebodes? Why is this *yes* more decisive and greater than all the moral responsibility expressed in its details, in concrete practice? The answer to this question reveals the ultimate essence of the One sent by the Father. Christ is the One "sent" by the Father; He is the One who reveals the Father to men and to the world. "This is true life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the one You have sent, Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁶ The most important thing is that "they know You," that they love You, because this You is the meaning of life.

"Yes, I love You," Peter said. And the reason for this *yes* consisted in the fact that in those eyes that had set on him that first time, and had set on him so many other times during the following days and years, he had glimpsed who God was, who Yahweh was, the true Yahweh: *mercy*.¹⁰⁷ God's relationship with his creature is revealed in Jesus as love, and therefore as mercy. Mercy is the attitude of the Mystery towards any kind of weakness, error, and forgetfulness on man's part: in the face of any crime that man commits, God loves him. Simon felt this. This is where his "Yes, I love You" comes from.

The meaning of the world and of history is the mercy of Christ, Son of the Father, sent by the Father to die for us. In Milosz's play *Miguel Mañara* Miguel was going to the Abbot every day to weep over his past sins. One day the Abbot tells him, somewhat impatiently, "Stop weeping like a woman. All this never existed." What does he mean by "never existed"? Miguel had murdered, raped, he had done all kinds of things. "All this never existed. Only He is."¹⁰⁸ He, Jesus, addresses us, becomes an "encounter" for us, asking us only one thing: not "What have you done?" but "Do you love me?"

To love Him above all things, then, does not mean that I have not sinned or that I will not sin tomorrow. How strange! It takes an infinite power to be this mercy, an infinite power from which—in this world, in the time and space given to us to live, whether for few or many years—we obtain, we draw gladness. Because, in the awareness of all his lowliness, a man is happy at the announcement of this mercy. Jesus is mercy. He is sent by the Father to let us know that the supreme feature of the essence of God for man is mercy. "You have bent down over our wounds and have healed us," says a Preface in the Ambrosian liturgy, "giving us a medicine stronger than our scars, a mercy greater than our fault. Thus even sin, in virtue of your invincible love, served to raise us up to divine life."¹⁰⁹ From this gladness comes peace, comes the possibility of peace. We, too, in all our misfortunes, in all our evil deeds, in »

¹⁰⁶ John 17:3.

¹⁰⁷ In this regard a quotation from St Ambrose can help. In his long comment on the Creation, when he reaches the seventh day, the day God rested, he affirms, "I thank the Lord our God who created such a marvellous work in which to find his rest. He created heaven, and I don't read that he rested; he created the earth, and I don't read that he rested; he created the sun, the moon, the stars, and I don't read that he rested even then; but I read that he created man and at this point he rested, having a being whose sins he could forgive" (St Ambrose, *Exameron*, IX, 76, in *Opera omnia di Sant'Ambrogio*, Vol. 1, Biblioteca Ambrosiana-Città Nuova Editrice, Milano-Roma 1979, 419).

¹⁰⁸ See O. Milosz, *Miguel Manara* (Milano: Jaca Book 1998), 48–63.

¹⁰⁹ Preface of XVI Sunday of Ordinary time.

» all our incoherence, in all our weakness, in that mortal weakness that man is, can really breathe and long for peace, and generate peace and respect for others

Respecting the other means looking at him with your eye on another Presence. The second century *Letter to Diognetus* says, "The Christians treat each other with a respect inconceivable to others."¹¹⁰ The word "respect" (*respectus*, from *re-spicio*) has the same root as *aspicio* (to look) and the *re-* indicates that you keep your eyes directed at something, like someone who is walking along while keeping his eyes on the object he is approaching. "Respect" means "looking at a person while keeping another in mind." It is like looking after a child when the mother is nearby: a teacher does not treat the child as she normally might, assuming she has some sense of modesty (perhaps even this is lost today). Without respect for what I make use of, for what is there for my use, for what I take hold of because I need it, there is no adequate relationship with anything. But respect cannot derive from the fact that I need what I have before me. From this point of view I merely dominate it. No, respect gives a "background" to what I use. Thus work becomes something noble and lighthearted, amidst all the worries we get up with in the morning. And our morning prayer is the renewal of this awareness. A man who looks at his wife while perceiving and acknowledging the Other, Jesus, within and beyond his wife's role and form, can have respect and veneration for her, can respect her freedom, which is relationship with the infinite, relationship with Jesus.

The beginning of human morality is an act of love

Simon's *yes* to Jesus cannot be considered the expression of a mere feeling; it is the beginning of a moral road that either opens with that *yes* or does not open at all. The beginning of a human morality is not the analysis of the phenomena that fill the self's existence, nor the analysis of human behaviour in view of a common good; this could be the beginning of an abstract secular morality, but not of a human morality.

St Thomas notes, "Man's life consists in the affection that chiefly sustains him and in which he finds the greatest satisfaction."¹¹¹ The beginning of human morality is an act of love. This requires a presence, the presence of someone who strikes us, who gathers all our powers and stirs them, attracting them to a good that is unknown, but is desired and awaited, that good which is Mystery.

The dialogue between Jesus and Peter ends in a strange way. Peter, who is about to follow Jesus, is concerned about the youngest, John, who was like a son to him. "And seeing him, he said to Jesus, 'What of him, Lord?' Jesus replies, 'Do not worry about him, just follow me.'¹¹² That *yes* is directed to a Presence that says, "Follow me, leave your life behind." "*Jesu, tibi vivo, Jesu, tibi morior, Jesu, sive vivo sive morior, tuus sum.*"¹¹³ Whether you live or die you are mine. You belong to me. I made you. I am your destiny. I am your meaning and the meaning of the world.

The protagonist of morality is the whole person, the whole "I." And the person has for its law a word that we all think we know and whose meaning, after a long time, if we are minimally faithful to what is original in us, we begin to glimpse: the word is love. The person has love for its law. "God, Being, is love," St John writes.¹¹⁴ »

¹¹⁰ Letter to Diognetus, *Migne* PG 2, 1167-86.

¹¹¹ See St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, II, IIae, q. 179, art. 1.

¹¹² See John 21:20-2.

¹¹³ *Jesu, tibi vivo, Jesu, tibi morior, Jesu, sive vivo sive morior, tuus sum.* (Jesus, yours I live, Jesus, yours I die. Jesus, whether I live or die, I am yours).

¹¹⁴ 1 John 4:8.

» Love is a judgment that is "moved" because of a Presence connected to destiny. It is a judgment, such as when you say, "This is Mont Blanc," or "This is a friend of mine." Love is a judgment filled with emotion because of a Presence connected with my destiny, that I discover; I glimpse, I sense that I am connected with my destiny. When John and Andrew saw Him for the first time and heard Him say, "Come home with me. Come and see," and then spent all those hours listening to Him talking, they didn't understand, but they sensed that that person was connected with their destiny. They had heard all the public speakers, all their opinions and all the party slogans. But only that man was connected with their destiny. Christian morality is a revolution on earth, because it is not a list of laws, but love for being. You can do wrong a thousand times and you will always be forgiven, you will always be picked up and you can start your journey again, if your heart takes up that *yes* again. What is important in that "Yes, Lord, I love You" is a striving of my whole person, determined by the awareness that Christ is God and by love for this Man who came for me. My whole awareness is determined by this, and I can go wrong a thousand times a day, and be afraid to lift up my head, but no one can take this certainty from me. I just pray the Lord, pray the Spirit to change me, to make me an imitator of Christ, so that my presence may become more like the presence of Christ himself.

Morality is love, it is love for Being become man, an event in history, that reaches me through the mysterious companionship that historically is called the Church, or the mysterious Body of Christ, or the People of God: I love Him in this companionship. I can be scolded for a hundred thousand errors, they can take me to court, the judge can send me to prison even without a trial, with blatant injustice, without asking whether or not I am guilty, but they cannot take this attachment from me, which keeps thrilling me with the desire for good; in other words, attachment to Him. Because the good is not "the good," but attachment to Him, following that face, His Presence, carrying His Presence everywhere, telling it to anyone and everyone, so that this Presence may dominate the world; for the end of the world will be the moment in which this Presence becomes evident to everyone.

This is the new morality. It is a love, not rules to follow. And evil is to offend the object of love or to forget it. You could humbly analyze all the pathways of a man's life, and could quite rightly say, "this is bad, this is good," make a list of all the errors a man can make and put them in order, and then you would have a textbook on morality. But morality is in me, morality is that I love Him who made me and is here present. If this weren't the case I could use morality exclusively for pressing my own advantage, and in any case it would lead to despair. You have to read the works of Pasolini or Pavese to understand this. But, there again, on the other hand, you only need to remember Judas.

The permanence of the new morality

If the beginning of the new morality is an act of love, of adherence, and this requires the Presence of someone who has struck us and attracted all our powers—just as Jesus did to Simon—then we have to answer the question of how this event goes on living as a presence in our day-to-day existence. The answer establishes the possibility of the new morality in the present, here and now, otherwise it would begin for us as something intellectual, abstract, and discursive. This answer lies in that Christian word that belongs to the experience of the present, without which we could not even know whether our experience is concrete or just fantasy. The word is "memory." In memory, the event that I experience in all its wealth becomes immersed in the flow of time and space, it is part of a history.

The first condition for a new morality is to live the memory of that Presence, which is »

» beyond the bounds of human knowledge, i.e., to acknowledge, here and now, the Presence that cannot be reduced to any human hypothesis. This Presence is a reality that stands before us and, by the power of His Spirit, is in us. It is permanent in our life, and is so powerful that, in our adherence to it, it makes a new creation possible in us. So, after imperfection and error, at the end of every action, which is always out of proportion and always imperfect, you can get up again and do better, because His gift goes on, like a fresh spring, which no limitation of ours can stop.

The permanence of this Presence is grace, pure event, and we cannot resist adhering to it here and now. We acknowledge it and adhere to it. It is grace, as is the encounter, the astonishment, its continuity and the impulse of adherence. And this grace becomes ours because we accept it. Accepting this absolute newness, which happens over and over again a thousand times a day, is the supreme aspect of freedom. Just as for John and Andrew, for Simon, for Zacchaeus, the beginning of our change is a grace, a gift. We have had an encounter whose aim is to change us and fulfill us, and we have adhered to this Presence, which corresponds exceptionally to our expectations, with a lasting adherence, as for Zacchaeus, who was no longer determined by the imperfection he fell into, because that Presence was there like a pure, cool stream, washing away the filth from the forest of his humanity.¹¹⁵

The awe of the encounter, the permanence of that awe, the adherence to that Presence that goes on, imply the embrace and the unity with all those whom the Presence itself puts near us. This Presence is set before our eyes so that through us, with our defects, and our sorrow for these defects, and the strange impetus it gives, it may be more known and loved.

7. RESPONSIBILITY AND DECISION

We have been loved and we are loved; this is why we “are.” The moral law and morality, in other words the concrete lack of proportion, expressed in action, of our person to the mystery of Being, are judged by this first and fundamental “law”: acknowledging and accepting to be loved. We are loved. As a consequence it follows that loving, in its essential form, in its supreme expression, is accepting to be loved, because all the rest flows from here.

If I am loved, if I “am” because I am loved, then the great problem of my existence, of my being in the world, what makes it possible for my subject to become protagonist of a new world, in which the eternal begins to be experienced in time, is my answer—*my answer to the You* that loves me, my correspondence, my valuing of what He created in me at my origin, precisely so that I could become aware of Him, of Him who, in an exceptional way, decided to come amongst us, to live with me and to speak to me in a familiar way with His words, not copied from the dictionary, but drawn from the eternal, from the depths of Being in which he has made me share.

If I am because I am loved, I have to respond (*respondeo*): this is the origin of “responsibility.” This is the endpoint of all the passionate emotion of our being, loaded with an eternal sensitivity, in movement towards the moulding of the final form, which is the glory of Christ’s face,¹¹⁶ in which even the smallest pebble will have its place.¹¹⁷ It is the word “responsibility” that assures the outcome of an experience of correspondence with the truth, with the fascination of beauty, with the moving experience of the good, with ineffable happiness. In its completeness, the greatness of the word “responsibility” is the main source of »

¹¹⁵ See Luke 19:1–10.

¹¹⁶ See 2 Corinthians 3:18.

¹¹⁷ See Romans 8:19–23.

» zest for life. If you are not responsible within what gives you pleasure or what attracts you, if you do not participate in it with some responsibility, then it is not yours. So heaven implies a decision of yours, it implies responsibility, because heaven is for man and man is free.¹¹⁸

Responsibility is expressed as freedom's decision in front of the Presence that is acknowledged as corresponding totally to one's destiny. But all too often our way of thinking of freedom's decision is mistaken, as if it were an act I ultimately determine, as if I were the one to decide to answer *yes* to you and to decide to say, "your will be done." No, it is something else. The decision cannot be taken in the voluntary sense (as being synonymous with willpower).

To understand its dynamics let's think of the tax-collector at the back of the temple: he didn't dare raise his eyes, he just said, "Lord have mercy on me!" and he sensed that his request would be accepted, that God would appreciate it and that justice was thus satisfied.¹¹⁹ And let's think of St Peter again.¹²⁰ Why, when Christ asked him, "Do you love me?" was not even the betrayal of a few days earlier an obstacle? He answered *yes* at once, as the consequence of an awe that had begun at Capernaum, when Andrew, his brother, had brought him to Christ and he had felt himself looked at by Him in such a way as to be transfixed and defined in his humanness, in his character, so much so that he had his name changed.¹²¹ What was that exceptional impression, that initial awe made of, even psychologically speaking? The initial awe was a judgment that at once became an attachment. It was a judgment that stuck like glue, a judgment that affixed Peter and the disciples to Him like glue. As each day passed, it added another "coat of glue," and they could no longer free themselves. "But you never obey the laws!"¹²² All the Pharisees were scandalized by their Master because He went around with those who didn't keep the laws! And the apostles didn't know what to answer: "We don't know if we are obeying the laws or not, but we are attached to this man." It was not a sentimental attachment, an emotional phenomenon, but a phenomenon of reason, a manifestation of that reason that "attaches" you to the person before you, since it is a judgment of value. As you look at the person you are taken up by a wonder full of esteem that attaches you to him. There is no hint of irrationality or forcing. "If we go away from You where shall we go? You have the words that explain life," Peter told Him one day, impetuous as always.¹²³ And after that affirmation he got it all wrong again, so much so that Jesus told him "Go away from me Satan! Because you don't want me to do what my Father wants, but what you have in mind."¹²⁴ What a humiliation! But the outcome was that Peter became even more attached to Him.

Peter's *yes* was neither the result of willpower nor the result of a "decision" of Simon, the man. It was the emergence, the surfacing of a whole chain of tenderness and of adherence that was explained by the esteem he had for Him (therefore it was an act of reason), which meant his only answer could be *yes*. This is the truest, the most genuine human "mechanism," that which makes us better friends of those who are friends to us, that fills us with tenderness for our mother and admiration for our father. It increases with time, and never stops. And it is not irrational; it is the only thing that is rational. For Peter, it was a friendship that did not depend on him, but had been brought to birth in him. For many would listen to »

¹¹⁸ Péguy wrote some wonderful pages about freedom. See for example *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents*, Pansy Pakenham, trans.; introduction by Alexander Dru (New York: Harper c1956).

¹¹⁹ See Luke 18:9-14.

¹²⁰ See John 21:15-19.

¹²¹ John 1:40-2.

¹²² See Matthew 12:1-14; 15:1-20.

¹²³ See John 6:68.

¹²⁴ See Matthew 16:21-3.

» Jesus and say “wonderful,” but then they would go away. This friendship, this tenderness did not take root in them.

It was not a decision as we normally conceive of it, which is to say as the only way in which freedom goes into action. The nature of the decision is not a strong act of will as in Alfieri’s “Want, always want, want with all your might!”¹²⁵ Man is fragile and as weak as a child.¹²⁶ Only if man acknowledges this does he begin to grow. So the decision springs forth as the establishment of a sympathy. The apostles followed Jesus because they were attached to Him with a judgment that made them capable of a perfectly rational decision, because where a relationship is generated that turns into a deep sympathy, when an attachment born of an incomparable awe is renewed, rationality is an event.¹²⁷

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¹²⁵ V. Alfieri, “Lettera responsiva a Ranieri de’ Casalbigo [6 September 1783],” in *Tragedie*, I, Paris 1888, p. LXXX.

¹²⁶ See the final words of the dramatic poem by H. Ibsen, *Brand*. “Answer me, O God above! In death’s jaws: Can human will, summed, avail no fraction of salvation?” Henry Ibsen, *Brand: A Dramatic Poem*, F.E. Garrett, trans. (London & Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons 1917), 223.

¹²⁷ See L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, Viviane Hewitt, trans. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press 1998), 48–58.