

“Is it possible to encounter Christ today? Where? How?”

“GENERATING TRACES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD”

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

by Luigi Giussani*

1. THE EVENT GOES ON IN HISTORY THROUGH THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THE BELIEVERS

Jesus Christ is present here and now. He goes on being present in history through the uninterrupted succession of men who belong to Him through the action of His Spirit, as members of His Body, the prolongation of His Presence in time and space.¹ Baptism is the action with which Christ, died and risen, grasps those who the Father has put into his hands and takes them up into Himself.² In this way they become part of His figure, of His personality, members of His Body. So Christ is like a body that grows in time, a personality that becomes more and more evident in history; as St Paul says, “Until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”³

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Let's go to the page of the New Testament in which this factor, the community of the believers, emerges in history. Here we literally witness the birth of a new, irresistible protagonist. Saul was on his way to Damascus, in command of a platoon of soldiers, to arrest the Christians of that city and put them in prison. At a certain point of the journey, a light envelops him and throws him to the ground. As he falls he hears a powerful voice, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”⁴ Here, in the question addressed to Saul, a company of men suddenly emerges as a new factor in history. Saul was persecuting people who, for the most part, he had never met (maybe some of them had seen him). “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” This establishes an identity between people who were strangers to him, and who he was on his way to persecute, and that Being whose voice in that moment filled earth and heaven, in other words his whole life, overwhelming it forever, making him the starting point of a triumphant battle destined to fill all of time and history.

Let's try to imagine ourselves in the place of one of the members of the early Christian community in Damascus. The question addressed to Saul establishes an identity between »

¹ See Ephesians 1:23. See also L. Giussani, *Why the Church?* 118–20.

² See John 10:28–29. See also L. Giussani, *Why the Church?* 187–8.

³ Ephesians 4:13.

⁴ Acts 9:4.

* Source: L. Giussani - S. Alberto - J. Prades,
Generating Traces in the History of the World,
McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2010, pp. 31-33.

» me, living in Damascus, scraping together a living making carpets, and that Man I heard old Ananias talking about, a man called Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary. As we have recalled, that day in Nain, on seeing a widowed mother following the bier of her dead son, this Jesus was gripped by the impulse of emotion and, stepping forward, put a hand on her shoulder and said to her, "Woman, don't cry," a strange thing to say. Then he raised her son to life.⁵ But how can you say such a thing to a widow who has just lost her son? It's absurd. And yet it was this very "absurdity" that left the people agape. And I, too, stood there agape and said, "Yes, there is the source of life; that Man is the source of life." He had said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."⁶ Yes, that Man is the Way, the Resurrection and the Life.⁷ So I joined the Damascus group and am now about to be persecuted, put in jail, and maybe put to death by Saul. Though he doesn't know me, he is coming to persecute me because I am identified with that Man who met John and Andrew,⁸ that Man who raised that widow's son to life, who told Zacchaeus, "Come down, because I am coming to eat at your house,"⁹ who took a child in his arms, held it to his breast and said, "Woe to whomever puts a stumbling block before the smallest of these children."¹⁰ I am one with that Man, with that Man who one day, after climbing a hill, turned to look at the crowd following him, and felt pity for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd,¹¹ a symbol, as it were, of the whole of mankind. I am one with Him, and whoever persecutes me persecutes Him. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?" That "persecuting *me*" indicates that He and I are one, identified together: we have become one. That "*me*" reveals that Christians and Christ Himself are the same thing.

Some years later, St Paul wrote down what he had understood from that moment: that Christians and Christ are one. Those who have been taken hold of by the action of baptism have entered Christ and have become one with Him. "You who have been baptized in Christ have become one with Christ."¹² So there is no longer any difference. "There is no longer Jew nor Greek (the great cultural difference at the time), no slave nor freeman (the great social divide), no man nor woman, since you are all one in Christ Jesus."¹³ You are all one, *eis*,¹⁴ a single being, one in Christ Jesus. This is the unity that that man who had fallen down on the Damascus Road discovered, confusedly, when he heard himself asked, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?"

Unity with Christ means the unity amongst Christians. Thus, a short time later, St Paul was able to observe, "we who share in the one bread" are one.¹⁵ We are one in the ontological sense of the word, so much so that each of us is a member of the same body. In fact, to point out the wrong way people were treating each other in the Ephesus community, St Paul wrote, "Don't you know you are members of each other?"¹⁶ Not only members of Christ, therefore, but members of each other. The relationship between Christ and me, between Christ and you, is the relationship between you and me. There is no wrong that can become an objection or offer resistance to this unity. »

⁵ See Luke 7:11-17.

⁶ John 11:25.

⁷ See John 14:6.

⁸ See John 1:35-39.

⁹ See Luke 19:5.

¹⁰ See Matthew 18:2-10.

¹¹ See Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34.

¹² See Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:27.

¹³ Galatians 3:27-8.

¹⁴ See Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:17.

¹⁶ See Ephesians 4:25.

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What can conquer the fear, the emptiness and the boredom that fills these days? As Fr. Carrón wrote in his letter to "Corriere della Sera," "It is a presence, not our strategies, our intelligence or our bravery, that propels and sustains each of our lives. [...] Only the God who enters history as a man can conquer that deep fear."

To help each other to discern the signs of victory throughout this time, we suggest the following resources:

- **Julián Carrón**, "[This is how we learn to conquer fear in times of difficulty](#)," letter to "Corriere della Sera," March 1, 2020

- **Julián Carrón**, "[Faith and Solitude](#)", speech from the "Solitude, the Enemy" conference (Florence, November 16, 2019), in "Traces Magazine," February 2020

- **Teresa Gutiérrez de Cabiedes**, *Van Thuan: libero tra le sbarre [Van Thuan, Free Behind Bars]*, Città Nuova, Rome 2018 ([book review](#))

Please remember that you may send questions and witnesses about this time to:

<http://eventi.comunioneliberazione.org/gscontributi>

in the "School of Community" section.

Other suggestions:

Books

- Bruce Marshall, *To Every Man a Penny*, Houghton Mifflin 1949 ([book review](#))

- Robert Hugh Benson, *Lord of the World*, Christian Classics 2016 ([book review](#))

Film

- *Of God and Men* (2010) by Xavier Beauvois ([review](#))

- *Miracle of Marcelino* (1955) by Ladislao Vajda ([review](#))

- *The Lives of Others* (2006) by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck ([review](#))