

The Gratitude of Buenos Aires

Illustrious Counselor of the Apostolic Nunciature Monsignor Luigi Bianco, Mr. Secretary of Worship Dr. Juan José Laprovita, ladies and gentlemen, good evening. In presenting Monsignor Luigi Giussani's book, *The Religious Sense*, I am not simply performing a formal act of protocol, nor what could seem to be simple professional curiosity about a work bringing into focus an explanation of our faith. Above all, I am expressing gratitude that is due. For many years now, Msgr. Giussani's writings have inspired me to reflect and have helped me to pray, and I am here today to bear witness to this. They have taught me to be a better Christian.

Monsignor Giussani is one of those unexpected gifts which the Lord has given our Church after Vatican II; he has caused a wealth of individuals and movements to rise up, outside the pastoral structures and programs, that are offering miracles of new life within the Church.

Last May 30th, in St. Peter's Square, the Pope met publicly with the new communities and ecclesial movements. It was a truly transcendental event. He asked specifically for four founders from among the many movements to give their witness. Among these was Msgr. Giussani who, in 1954, the year he began teaching religion in a public school in Milan, initiated the movement Communion and Liberation, which is present today in sixty countries in the world and is much beloved by the Pope.

The Religious Sense is not a book exclusively for members of the Movement, nor is it only for Christians or believers. It is a book for all men who take their humanity seriously. I dare say that today the primary question we must face is not so much the problem of God—the existence, the

A talk delivered by the Archbishop of the capital during the presentation of the Spanish edition of Father Giussani's *The Religious Sense*. The heart's demands, reason open to the Mystery, and the wonder of an encounter

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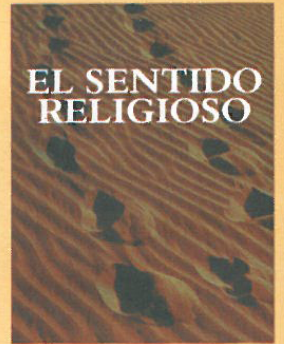
knowledge of God—but the problem of man, the knowledge of man and the finding in man himself the mark that God has made so as to be able to meet with him.

Fides et Ratio

By happy coincidence, this presentation is being held the day after the publication of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. It opens with this dense consideration: "Moreover, a cursory glance at ancient history shows clearly how in different parts of the world, with their different cultures, there arise at the same time the fundamental questions which pervade human life: *Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?* These are the questions that we find in the sacred writings of Israel, as also in the Veda and the Avesta; we find them

in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, and in the preachings of Tirthankara and Buddha; they appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles, as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. They are questions that have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart. In fact, the answer given to these questions decides the direction which people seek to give to their lives." (*Fides et Ratio*, par. 1) For this reason, Father Giussani's book is

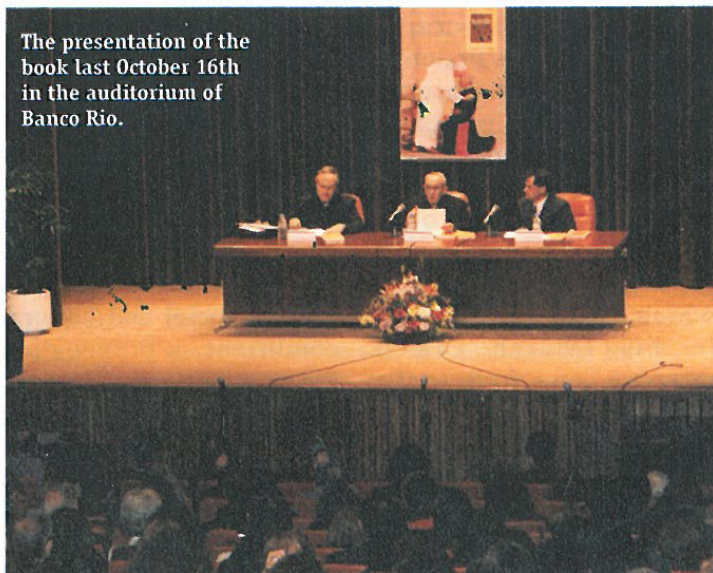
LUIGI GIUSSANI



EDITORIAL
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Encuentro
Ediciones

Father Giussani's book translated into Spanish and presented in Buenos Aires last October 16th in the auditorium of Banco Río. In Argentina *El Sentido Religioso* is co-published by Ed. Sudamericana and by Carmina and José Miguel Oriol's Ediciones Encuentro.



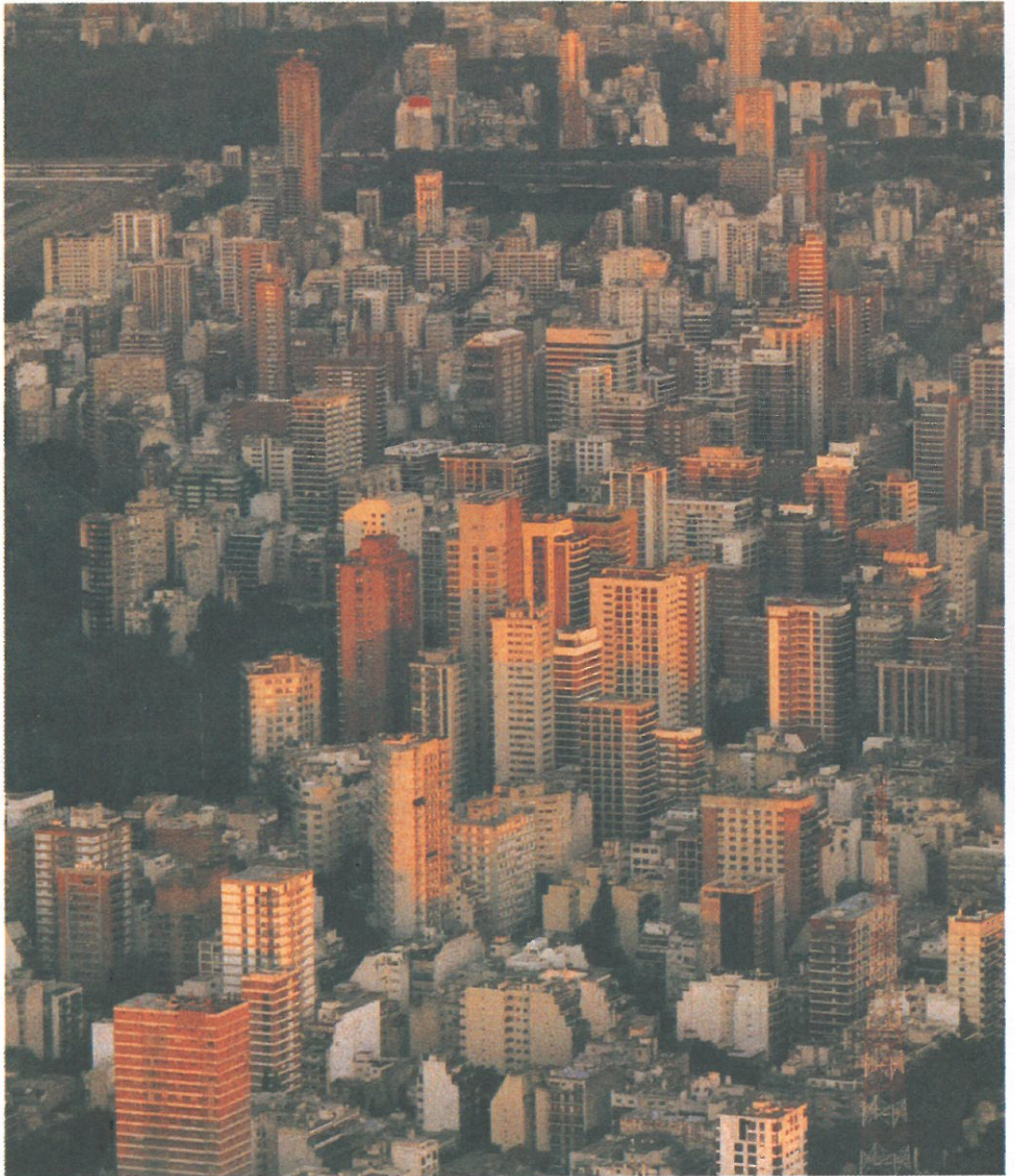
The presentation of the book last October 16th in the auditorium of Banco Río.

in tune with the encyclical: it is for all people who take their humanity seriously, who take their questions seriously.

Paradoxically, in *The Religious Sense*, little is said about God and much is said about man. Much is said about his “whys,” much about his ultimate needs. Quoting the Protestant theologian Niebuhr, Giusani explains: there exists nothing more incomprehensible than the answer to a question that is not asked. And one of the difficulties of our supermarket culture—where offers are made to everyone to hush the clamoring of their hearts—lies in giving voice to those questions of the heart. This is the challenge. Faced with the torpor of life, with this tranquillity at a low cost (even if offered in a wide assortment), the challenge consists in asking ourselves the real questions about the meaning of man, of his existence, and in answering these questions. But if we wish to answer questions that we don’t dare to, don’t know how to, or cannot formulate, we fall into absurdity. For a man who has forgotten or censored his fundamental “whys” and the burning desire of his heart, talking to him about God ends up being something abstract, esoteric, or a push toward a devotion which has no effect on his life. You cannot start a discussion of God if you don’t first blow away the ashes suffocating the burning cinders of the fundamental “whys.” The first step is to make some sense of those questions which are hidden, buried, perhaps agonizing, but which exist.

The restlessness of the heart

The drama of today’s world is not only the absence of God, but also and above all the absence of man, the loss of his physiognomy, of his destiny, of his identity, a certain incapacity to explain the fundamental needs that dwell in his heart. The prevailing mentality, and deplorably that of many Christians, supposes that there is an unbreachable opposition between reason and faith. Instead, and here lies another paradox, *The Religious Sense* emphasizes the fact that speaking seriously about God means exalting and defending reason and



discovering its value and the right way to use it. This is not reason understood as a pre-established measure of reality, but reason open to reality in all its factors and one whose starting point is experience, whose starting point is this ontological foundation which awakens a restlessness in the heart. It is not possible to raise the question of God calmly, with a tranquil heart, because this would be an answer without a question. Reason that reflects on experience is a reason that uses as a criterion for judgment the measuring of everything against the heart—but heart taken in the Biblical sense, that is as the totality of the innate demands that everyone has: the need for love, for happiness, for truth, and for justice. The heart is the core of the internal transcendent, where the roots are sunk of truth, beauty, goodness, the unity which gives harmony to all of being. We define human reason in this sense; not as rationalism, that laboratory rationalism, idealism, or nominalism >

➤ (this last so much in fashion now) which can do everything, which claims to possess reality because it is in possession of the number, the idea, or the rationale of things. Or, if we want to go even further, possessing reality by absolutely dominating a technology that surpasses us in the very moment in which we use it, thus falling into that form of civilization which Guardini liked to call "the second form of unculture." We, instead, speak of a reason that is not reduced, is not exhausted in the mathematical, scientific, or philosophical method. Every method, in fact, is suited to its own sphere of application and to its specific object.

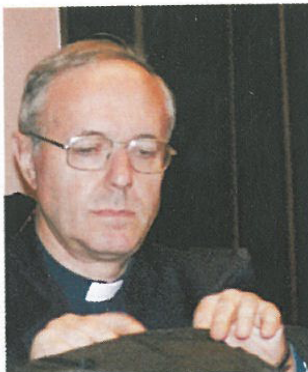
Existential certainty

Concerning personal relationships, the only adequate method for reaching true knowledge is to live and live together a vivid companionship that, through multiple experiences and manifold signs, allows us to arrive at what Giussani calls "moral certainty," or even better, "existential certainty." This is because certainty does not reside in the head, but in the harmony of all man's faculties, and is in possession of all the requisites for being a real and a rational certainty at the same time. In its turn faith is, precisely, a particular application of the method of moral or existential certainty, a particular case of faith in others, in the signs, evidence, convergences, witness of others. Despite this, faith is not contrary to religion. Like all typically human acts, faith is reasonable, which does not imply that it can be reduced to mere reasoning. It is reasonable—let's push the term—not reasoning.

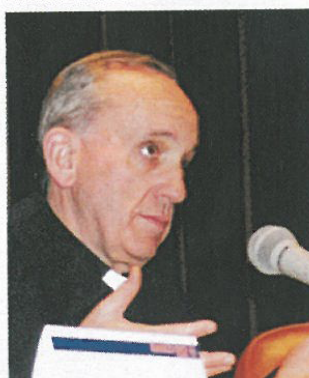
Why is there pain, why death, evil? Why is life worth living? What is the ultimate meaning of reality, of existence? What sense does it make to work, love, become involved in the world? Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?

These are the great and primary questions that young people ask, and adults too; and not only believers, but everyone, atheists and agnostics alike.

Sooner or later, especially in the situations at the very edge of existence, in the face of great grief or great love, in the experience of educating one's children or of working at a job which apparently makes no sense, these questions inevitably rise to the surface. These are questions that cannot be uprooted. I have said that they are questions that even agnostics ask. I would like to mention here, paying him



Father Mario Peretti.



The Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Monsignor Jorge Mario Bergoglio.

homage, a great poet from Buenos Aires, an agnostic, Horacio Armani. Whoever reads his poems encounters a sage exposition of questions that are open to an answer.

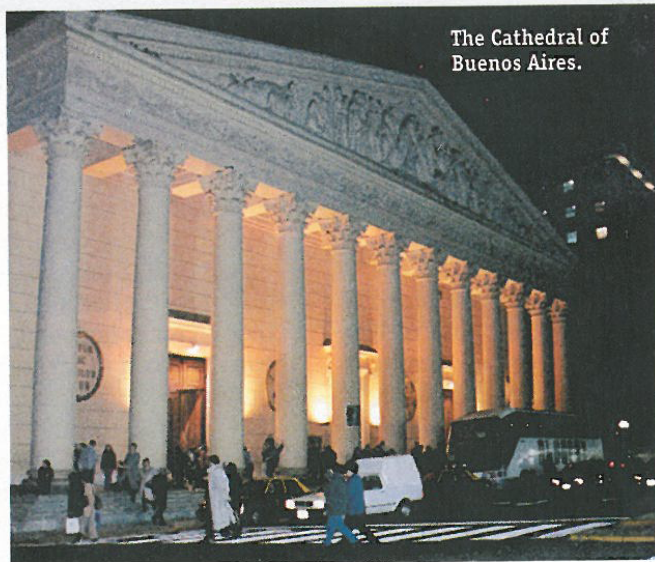
The total response

Man cannot be content with reductive or partial answers, forcing him to censor or neglect some aspect of reality. In fact, however, we do this, and this is a form of running away from ourselves. Man needs a total response which comprehends and saves the entire horizon of his "self" and his existence. He possesses within himself a yearning for the infinite, an infinite sadness, a nostalgia—the *nostos algos* of Odisco—which is satisfied only by an equally infinite response. The human heart proves to be the sign of a Mystery, that is, of something or someone who is an infinite response. Outside the Mystery, the needs for happiness, love, and justice never meet a response that fully satisfies man's heart. Life would be an absurd desire if this response did not exist. Not only does the human heart present itself as a sign, but so does all of reality. The sign is something concrete, it points in a direction, it indicates something that can be seen, that *reveals* a meaning, that can be experienced, but which refers to another reality that cannot be seen. Otherwise the sign would be meaningless.

On the other hand, to interrogate oneself in the face of these signs one needs an extremely human capacity, the first one we have as men and women: wonder, the capacity to be amazed, as Giussani calls it; in the last analysis, a child's heart. Only wonder brings knowledge. Notice that moral and cultural degradation begin to arise when this capacity for wonder is weakened, canceled, or dies.

The cultural opiate tends to cancel, weaken, or kill this capacity for wonder. The beginning of every philosophy is wonder. Pope Luciani once said that the drama of contemporary Christianity lies in the fact that it puts categories and norms in the place of wonder. Wonder comes before all categories, it is what leads me to seek, to open myself up; it is what makes the answer—not a verbal or conceptual answer—possible for me. If wonder opens me up as a question, the only response is the *encounter*, and only with the encounter is my thirst quenched. And with nothing is it quenched more.

*Archbishop of Buenos Aires.
(Notes not reviewed by the author.)



The Cathedral of Buenos Aires.