

work in Russia that had been started and inspired by Men. (Further details in a future issue of the *Review*.) We received the impression from those who knew him of a man who had placed himself completely in God's hands, a man without fear but full of radiant joy and infectious humour. He remarked that he had "been sent to baptize the savage tribe of the Soviet intelligentsia." Now that was quite a mission, and no one would claim that it is ended yet. Nevertheless, when someone said to him, "They will kill you," he replied in all honesty: "I'm ready." It appears that here we have an example of a man who was both free and happy to the very end, an end that was also a new beginning.

Stratford Caldecott  
Oxford, England

\* \* \*

*The Religious Sense*, Luigi Giussani; translated from the Italian by John Zucchi. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). \$44.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

"When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" Many of us have wondered whether these words of our Lord were meant to apply to our own times, since it often seems as if the people of our day are not only without faith, but have built up such an effective armour against any consideration of the supernatural that they are entirely impervious to religion. It is not that they are militant atheists—would that they

were!—but rather they manifest absolutely no curiosity as to whether Christianity might be true or false. They are simply not interested. But despite that, our unbelieving contemporaries are among those for whom Christ died, and thus the question of how to bring the Gospel to them ought to be of interest to us. But how are we to do this, how are we to make those who seem to have willfully blinded themselves take an interest in colours?

Monsignor Luigi Giussani's book, *The Religious Sense*, is an attempt to present to modern man, not the whole Gospel, but the beginnings of the Gospel, the basic truths that, if grasped and held, will eventually lead the seeker into the fullness of Christ Jesus. Monsignor Giussani is well-known to many North American Catholics as the founder of "Communion and Liberation," an international Catholic lay movement which is particularly strong among university students. A former high school and university teacher, he is the author of numerous books, several of which have been translated into English. The present work is the first in a trilogy, of which the second and third are *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* and *Why the Church?* All are published by McGill-Queen's University Press.

If one were to open *The Religious Sense* at random, he might think that although it contained many beautiful insights into man and his situation, it was rather a work of the heart, not of the head. But this

conclusion is deceptive. Actually the book, in its own way, is tightly argued, and presents in a logical sequence reasons why we ought to look beyond appearances, especially appearances as interpreted by a rigidly secularist culture, at the God who has surely created and who surely upholds all that is about us.

A constant enemy of systems that are *imposed* on reality, so that we see not that which is, but an image or interpretation of things, Giussani begins his argument with a discussion of how, when we seek to know any thing, be it a material thing or otherwise, the object into which we are inquiring determines how we are to proceed. We cannot, for example, usefully study human nature with a microscope. And from this simple beginning, Giussani builds an argument that will take the reader to the threshold of Christian revelation.

He does this by a series of what he calls "premises," or truths which we must grasp and which must accompany us on our journey. They are "realism," "reasonableness" and "the impact of morality on the dynamic of knowing," this latter being our duty to engage ourselves with the objects that we are seeking to know, for only if we "love the truth of an object more than the image that we have formed of it," only then will we be able to encounter reality as it is. After grasping these premises, we are at the point where we are ready to confront the "religious sense," that is, we are invited to see man asking

the ultimate questions about himself, such as, "What am I?" And, Giussani argues, no partial answer will ever satisfy us. In the end only God will.

Thus, an aspect of Giussani's argument that runs through the entire book is that in our thinking we must be *engaged* with the great realities that overshadow man's existence, with life itself, with death, with seeking meaning for what we do. Among the many stories that he relates is one of a philosophy professor, an atheist, who was attending the funeral of a colleague who had died suddenly while teaching. Giussani observes that the "expression on his face was extremely tense and, without realizing it, I paused for a fraction of a second to observe him some more. Then perhaps he sensed an interrogation, for he exclaimed: 'Death is the fact that lies at the origin of all philosophy.'" A philosophy or an intellectual life that avoids such questions is either in subjection to an ideology that enslaves us, or is a more or less conscious attempt to flee from the pain involved in having to face up to them.

Although the argument of *The Religious Sense* begins with man and never strays far from his needs and aspirations, I do not think that it is subjective or anthropocentric in a bad sense. Objective reality and man's intellect, not his feelings, always dominate the argument. And the various systems of the modern world which reject or ignore God are shown to be lacking in the very things that are considered their hall-

marks, that is, in open-minded devotion to the real and in a subsequent willingness to take account of all the factors that govern a situation.

Often Giussani will present a philosophic or theological truth in a fresh or disconcerting way in order that our contemporaries, who perhaps are bored by what they see as stale presentations of truth, might be interested. One of the best examples of this occurs in chapter four where Giussani shows us that man is not exhausted by his material component but that he also contains a spiritual element. After speaking of what can be known by measurement, that is, the material, he goes on to say, "But if a person is totally engaged in self-reflection, he will note within his 'I' elements not identifiable with the measurable—these are the immeasurable and the immutable and will be defined as idea, judgment, and decision.

"Let us begin with *idea* and take, for example, the idea of goodness, a criterion we find within ourselves which allows us to say of someone, 'he is good.' This idea cannot be measured, quantified, or modified in time. When I was an infant, I would watch my mother and would 'feel'—although unreflectively—how good she was. 'My mother was good,' I say now, and, apart from a different, deepened consciousness, it is the very same idea of goodness which determines my affirmation now as it did then. I find that the content of my consciousness now is absolutely identical to that of

my infancy—it is immutable. . . . Thus idea, judgment, and decision are immutable. They are neither measurable nor divisible phenomena. . . . To summarize: the 'I' is made up of *two different realities*. To attempt to reduce the one into the other would be to deny the evidence of experience from which such a diversity emerges. These two realities may be referred to in many different ways. They have been called matter and spirit, and body and soul. Whatever the term, what is important is to understand that one is not reducible to the other."

One point concerning which Giussani frequently reminds the reader is that reality is a *sign*, that it points beyond itself to something or Someone, what he sometimes calls the "mystery": "The world is a sign. Reality calls us on to another reality. Reason, in order to be faithful to its nature and to the nature of such a calling, is forced to admit the existence of something else underpinning, explaining everything." Yet not all recognize, or are willing to recognize, this sign. Thus arise various "unreasonable positions before the ultimate question." Because they are *unreasonable* positions, they are all, in one way or another, a failure to see what is really there, an enslavement to a preconception or an ideology.

Giussani is in constant dialogue with a host of modern thinkers, philosophers, yes, but even more so, poets and novelists. Sometimes he quotes them to confirm his point;

sometimes he cites them as examples of a viewpoint that must be rejected if we are to be true to the discoveries that we can make simply by observing human nature and the world around us. For Giussani continually insists that when we turn away from the religious quest—a quest that necessarily will end in Christ—we are turning away from man, away from reality itself. Only by following some cramping ideology, or neglecting to attend to all the factors that make up a situation, can we be content with a materialist or nihilist account of the universe.

There is obviously much to praise in this book. But there is another point that must be considered, and that may be introduced thus: I have three friends, two of them priests who are Doctors of Philosophy, the third a writer and artist who is by no means hostile to new presentations of old truths. All of these, when Giussani is mentioned, reply with exclamations such as: "I can never wade through his stuff" or "I can't make head or tail of what he is saying" or "You don't even need to read the book, just say some high-sounding nonsense and you can get by." Now here is a problem, certainly at least a literary problem. The fact of translation may play some small role in this, but it is certainly not all or even most of it. Giussani's prose is frequently vague, his use of terms odd. Sometimes his writing is worse than vague; it is dense. Here is a sample from a discussion of alienation in chapter 7: "This position

would have the ideal of life reside in a hypothetical evolution in a future, an evolution in which all should collaborate as the only reason for living, and where the spiritual dynamic of the individual and the evolving mechanism of social reality will be finalized. This phenomenon, in its entirety, is described by that supremely equivocal word: *progress*. This slant on reality considers the fundamental questions of the human being as mere functional stimuli, useful for the edification of progress almost similar to some kind of deceitful trick which nature plays in order to force us into serving its irreversible project."

Of course, the readers of this review cannot see this passage in context, but still it will serve my point. I think that I understand what this means, but I do not see the reason for such a way of expressing things. Some phrases, such as "the edification of progress," which I take to mean "working to build up the future by cooperating in grandiose building or technological schemes," are hardly ordinary English. I often felt when reading the book that I did not quite grasp the author's entire meaning, as if one frequently had to *guess* at what he meant. The use of peculiar terms, vaguely defined, does not help matters either. A key term, "elementary experience," is variously characterized thus: as "a complex of needs and 'evidences' which accompany us as we come face to face with all that exists;" as "heart;" as "the source of criteria;" and as "the con-

stitutive needs of our humanity.” Now in context all this makes more sense than taken in bits and pieces. But still I do not understand why the writer must make the reader labour to remember unusual meanings of words and phrases or to stumble through prose which is not notable for clarity. Such written expression detracts sufficiently from the book’s merits that I think many potential readers will be put off simply because of its form.

Of course, there are many other European intellectuals, and even some North Americans who write like this, but I cannot help but think that their writing would be more powerful were it more accessible. Certainly very profound thinkers existed before the twentieth century, writers whose writings are clear, even when, like Aristotle, they must create a special vocabulary for themselves.

I want to emphasize, though, that I am not calling for Monsignor Giussani to write superficial primers. The problem does not lie in the depth of his thought, but in his mode of expression. Clarity seems to me a desirable trait in a writer, but Giussani does not have it. And this is too bad because there *is* much in this book that might bring the modern secularist up short and turn his gaze toward matters hitherto deemed taboo by our secular culture. Perhaps the European intellectual scene is sufficiently different so that it would make a different impression there. But over here I fear that its influence

will be limited to those who already esteem him and its capacity to do good may be thwarted by what appear to me to be its literary faults.

Thomas Storck  
Greenbelt, Maryland

\* \* \*

Art: *For Whom and for What?* by Brian Keeble (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1998), £30 hb, £14.95 pb

Brian Keeble is one of those writers, craftsmen and publishers who have been strongly influenced by a seminal group of thinkers known as the “perennialist” or “traditionalist” school, the founding fathers of which were Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), René Guénon (1886-1951) and Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998). He is also closely associated with the “Temenos Academy” of Kathleen Raine, which is supported by Prince Charles and whose perspective lies behind many of the Prince’s recent public statements on architecture and Islam. The publication of these excellent essays on art from a traditionalist perspective provides a welcome opportunity to reintroduce this stream of thought—so influential on the Distributists through Eric Gill and his circle—to readers of *The Chesterton Review*.

The traditionalists are, it should be said, not usually highly regarded either in academic or in Christian circles. As a group they transcend any single religious exotericism—