

EDUCATION AND INTEGRAL EXPERIENCE

• Angelo Scola •

“If, in fact, tradition is the gift of the hypothesis
of truth in the very person of the educator,
this educator cannot but be a *witness*.”

“*The most important thing in education is not an ‘issue’ of education, much less of teaching.*”¹ Thus Jacques Maritain, going to the heart of the question of education, singles out the unsettling yet thrilling paradox of which every true educator is well aware. And, immediately after this statement, he suggests the reason for this paradox: “experience is an incommunicable fruit of suffering and memory through which the human person is formed. It therefore cannot be taught in any school or in any course.”²

In his book *The Risk of Education*³—a brilliant synthetic statement of the method of Christian life—Msgr. Luigi Giussani reveals a profound awareness of this paradox and offers a key to

¹Cf. J. Maritain, *Per una filosofia dell’educazione* (Brescia: La Scuola, 2001), 86.

²*Ibid.*, 87.

³“It was thus clear that the problem lay in the method of transmitting and developing the contents of the Christian tradition. This intuition was two-pronged, and its first element was theoretical: since the contents of the faith had to be accepted by reason, faith had to be presented as potentially capable of improving, enlightening, and enhancing authentic human values. The second element was practical, in that the contents of faith had to be tested in action. Rational evidence could lead to faith only from within the experience of a human need; and further, this need must be confronted from within a lived Christian reality, an involvement that would treat Christianity as a social, communal event” (Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, trans. Rosanna M. Giammanco Frongia [New York: Crossroads, 2001], 32–33).

interpreting it in the statement that concludes the book. When he is asked, “Do you consider yourself an educator?” Giussani replies, “I wish to be one with all my strength, because I don’t think that any human relationship is worthwhile if it isn’t a communication of however much truth has already become experience in one’s life.”⁴

The category of experience⁵—taken in its integrity and purged of every psychological-subjectivist reduction⁶—is therefore the cornerstone of Giussani’s educational proposal.⁷ Integral

⁴Luigi Giussani, *Il rischio educativo* (Turin: SEI, 1995), 162. This text appears only in the appendix to the 1995 Italian edition.

⁵Giussani’s studies on American Protestant theology contributed to his appreciation of the importance of this category: see Luigi Giussani, “Atteggiamenti protestanti e ortodossi davanti al dogma dell’Assunta,” *La Scuola Cattolica* 79 (1951): 106–113; id., “L’Eucaristia nella Chiesa anglicana,” *Ambrosius* 29 (1953): 164–174; id., “Da Amsterdam ad Evanston (Cronaca ecumenica),” *La Scuola Cattolica* 82 (1954): 133–150; id., “Il problema dell’ ‘Intercomunione’ nel protestantesimo attuale,” *Ambrosius* 30 (1954): 258–263; id., “Il recupero dei valori religiosi nel personalismo americano e la filosofia di Edgar Sheffield Brightman,” *Filosofia e vita* 8 (1967): 71–85; id., “Aspetti della concezione della storia in Reinhold Niebuhr,” *Rivista di Filosofia neo-scolastica* 60 (1968): 167–190; id., *Teologia protestante americana* (Venegono: La Scuola Cattolica, 1969); id., *Reinhold Niebuhr* (Milan, 1969); id., “La teologia protestante americana,” in Aa. Vv., *Problemi e orientamenti di teologia dogmatica* (Milan: C. Marzorati, 1979), 691–698; id., *Grandi linee della teologia protestante americana* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1989).

⁶“The person grows as a result of experience; that is, the appreciation of an objective relationship. . . . To have an experience means to comprehend the meaning of something. . . . It is also true, however, that we are not creators of meaning. The connection that binds something to everything else is an objective one. Therefore true experience . . . is composed of making things our own, but in such a way that we proceed within their objective meaning, which is the Word of an Other” (*The Risk of Education*, 98–99). On the subject of experience see also: id., *Il senso religioso* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997), 4–15. For an English translation, see *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

⁷It is striking to note that at the same time Giussani was working out his educational proposal, Karol Wojtyła was developing his reflection on person and act using a concept practically identical to what Giussani would call “elementary experience.” At the beginning of *Person and Act*, Wojtyła affirms: “The inspiration to embark upon this study came from the need to objectivize that great cognitive process which at its origin may be defined as the experience of man; this experience, which man has of himself, is the richest and apparently the most complex of all experiences accessible to him. Man’s experience of anything outside of himself is always associated with the experience of himself, and he never experiences anything external without having at the same time the experience of himself” (K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. A. Potocki [Dordrecht, Holland/

experience makes education possible because it guarantees “[the development of] all the structures of an individual until they are complete, while at the same time affirming all the possible active links those structures have to reality.”⁸

Such an approach, which is at once theoretical and practical, brings immediately into play the interpersonal nature of education. The educator and the student appear as free subjects involved in a relationship shaped by the real as it makes its presence felt. Reality, which invites us to affirm its meaning and brooks no refusal, calls freedom to the *risk* (this is the distinctive trait of every education!) of involvement.

Giussani thus lays the foundations upon which to ground an adequate educational method. In this sense, Giussani’s approach does not deal with the socio-cultural context because it aims at the human person—in the ultimate analysis the Christian—in his identity as a free yet finite person. This is indeed one of the reasons for the success of *The Risk of Education*, a success that continues to surprise as it occurs again and again in the most diverse cultures (from the U.S. to China) in the wake of the experience of education in act from which the book derives and to which, at the same time, it gave origin: Communion and Liberation.

What then are the factors of this educational process?

1. *Innovative traditio*

The unavoidable point of departure for reaching *experience in its integral form* is *tradition*. Giussani defines tradition as “the whole structure of values and meanings into which a child is born.” He adds: “the adolescent uses tradition as a sort of explanatory hypothesis.”⁹ It is important to note that, when understood in this way, tradition has nothing to do with a mere transmission of a system of concepts or doctrines that, like ballast, tie both educator and student to the past. It is rather, as Blondel said, a *place of practice*

Boston, U.S.A.: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979], 3).

⁸Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 50–51.

⁹*Ibid.*, 52–53.

and of experience,¹⁰ lived and proposed in first person by the educator to the freedom of the student, which is always situated in history. Therefore, tradition understood in these terms is by its nature open to all the questions that impinge on the present. It guarantees the process of generation—the full and authentic experience of fatherhood-sonship—that is an indispensable condition for the forging of civilization.

We thus understand the way Giussani's methodological proposal stresses *authority*,¹¹ a term whose most probable etymological meaning should not be forgotten. The Latin noun *auctoritas* is derived from the supine of the Latin verb *augere*, meaning "to make grow." Indeed, the authority figure "is the concrete expression of the 'working hypothesis'; it is the value-testing standard that tradition has given me and the expression of the shared life from which my existence originates."¹² The centrality of this figure in Giussani's educational proposal helps prevent a descent into the rationalism that even today, in various guises, handicaps the vast majority of educational institutions (schools, universities, but also families). This rationalism is expressed on the one hand, in the claim to "train" the student by supplying him with an ever more specialized set of principles with which to face reality (skills); on the other hand, in the idea that the student is a sort of self-sufficient monad, loosed from every bond. Information and practical-technical skills for the isolated individual: this is what education seems to be reduced to in our developed societies.

By contrast, the real educator is one who concretely and personally demonstrates to the student the possibility of fulfilling oneself in an integral way by living reality according to the totality of its factors. Such a position, as Giussani himself suggests, is capable of rooting out the terrible cancer of the educational process: skepticism.¹³ By the same token, skepticism is the inevitable result

¹⁰Cf. M. Blondel, *Storia e dogma* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1992), 103–137.

¹¹"We experience authority when we meet someone who possesses a full awareness of reality, who imposes on us a recognition and arouses surprise, novelty, and respect. There is an inevitable attraction within authority and an inexorable suggestion within us" (Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 64).

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³"Skepticism, whether obvious or not, takes up residence in the soul of the student. It has a subtle and sinister air; in more sensitive youths it storms up,

of what some “enlightened” pedagogical theorists (falling into an evident contradiction *in terminis*) have defined as self-education.

Only by exposing himself (i.e., by both revealing and risking himself) can the educator show—to use an expression dear to Giussani—the inexorable positivity of reality. Such self-exposing is, in its essential core, the proposal of the synthetic and explanatory hypothesis about the real by which the educator himself lives. Indeed, “we truly affirm reality only when we affirm the existence of its meaning.”¹⁴ It is therefore impossible to introduce someone to reality in its integral form—that is, to educate—without proposing its meaning. Without setting forth a *working hypothesis* for the student.¹⁵

2. The event of reality

This position—with that we pass on to a second element of the educational process as the locus of integral experience—implies a positive judgment about reality.¹⁶ Beyond the dramatic tensions that run through it, beyond its finitude, the real is a good. Education, to use the definition of Jungmann that is the starting point of *The Risk of Education*, is an introduction to total reality (“*eine Einführung in die Gesamtwirklichkeit*”) precisely because total reality corresponds—“correspondence” is the word that Giussani uses to translate the *cum-venientia* of medieval writers—to the human person’s heart (to his constitutive needs). It corresponds because it is for his good. It is therefore something positive. Here we have the keystone of Msgr. Giussani’s educational proposal, and, therefore, of his thought. It is important to clarify at once that, in Giussani’s vision, the affirmation of the primacy of reality is not merely a re-

emptying the soul of its capacity for enthusiasm and turns them into people who walk on soft sand: a good part of the effort is wasted by simply trying to walk on unstable soil” (ibid., 59).

¹⁴Ibid., 51.

¹⁵“This working hypothesis lends certainty to the positive nature of our endeavors. Without it we would be unable to act on anything or accomplish anything” (ibid., 53). In addition, see p. 87 in the Italian edition.

¹⁶ Regarding this implication see also id., *Il senso religioso*, 176–179. See footnote 6, above, for the English translation.

proposal of classical realism. The realism of Giussani's thought does lead to the affirmation that there exists a foundation of the truth of the real and that it can be known. But it also takes into account the key concepts of modernity. In addition to the category of experience, I am referring to those of *freedom*, of *truth as event*, of *knowledge* as structurally connected to *affection*, of being as *gift* (better, of the real as sign-symbol), which is the locus of the revelation of natural being and, through grace, of the very face of the Triune God (the foundation).¹⁷ We do not need to be reminded of the weight these categories have in contemporary philosophical-theological debates.

In particular, this perception of the positivity of the real is revealed in the (central Giussanian) category of *event*.¹⁸ *The mystery of being gives itself in the real. Each manifestation of the real (every real sign) presents itself as event (from the Latin e-venio, come out) that calls our freedom to account by pro-voking (i.e., calling forth, arousing) it to adhere.*¹⁹

¹⁷I have delved into these affirmations in A. Scola, *Un pensiero sorgivo*, and Aa. Vv., *Realtà, ragione e fede nel pensiero di Luigi Giussani*, Supplement to *Tracce* (Milan 1999), 15–45.

¹⁸Cf. L. Giussani, *L'Avvenimento cristiano* (Milan: BUR, 2003), 7–22; id., *Si può vivere così?* (Milan: BUR, 1994), 36–49; id., *Il cammino al vero è un'esperienza* (Turin: SEI, 1995), 77ff; id., *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?* (Milan: BUR, 1996), 109–110; id., *L'uomo e il suo destino. In cammino* (Marietti, 1999), 55–60; id., *L'io, il potere e le opere* (Marietti, 1820), (Genoa, 2000), 272; id., *All'origine della pretesa cristiana* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001), 32–42; L. Giussani—S. Alberto—J. Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998), 5–47.

¹⁹G. K. Chesterton offers help in expressing this structural listening to the real that mobilizes the creativity of the I by happening to us (and here we have the word that speaks of event!). In the novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, we find this paradoxical dialogue: “‘And then something did happen. Buck, it’s the solemn truth, that nothing has ever happened to you in your life. Nothing had ever happened to me in my life.’ ‘Nothing ever happened!’ said Buck, staring. ‘What do you mean?’ ‘Nothing has ever happened,’ repeated Barker, with a morbid obstinacy. ‘You don’t know what a thing happening means? You sit in your office expecting customers, and customers come; you walk in the street expecting friends, and friends meet you; you want a drink and get it; you feel inclined for a bet and make it. You expect either to win or lose, and you do either one or the other. But things are happening!’ and he shuddered ungovernably. ‘Go on,’ said Buck, shortly. ‘Get on.’ ‘As we walked wearily round the corners, something happened. When something happens, it happens first, and you see it afterwards. It happens of itself, and you have nothing to do with it’” (G. K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991], 318–319).

The pro-vocative force of the event thus understood is a matter of acknowledging that

there is also a mysterious yet real phenomenon that we can experience: a reality which is a sign of another reality . . . as we reach the top of the ladder in our examination of something, either analytical or sentimental, our human nature tells us there is something else beyond. This step also defines the concept of 'sign'. . . . It is the vanishing point which lies in every human experience, i.e., a point that does not close, but leads further.²⁰

In this sense, education, which seeks to introduce the student into an integral experience of reality, leads him progressively to grasp its proper nature, that of being a sign of the mystery, whose paternal countenance has been revealed to us by Jesus.

3. Participation

The integrity of experience, based on respect for the nature of the real as just indicated, is not guaranteed solely by the fact that the student is called to a comparison with a living and personal proposal of tradition—which is always innovative—through an authoritative figure. It is necessary that the student become personally engaged with this proposal:

The urgency of this comparison implies a tireless reminder of the student's responsibility. . . . It is not enough for the student to hear the announcement of an ideal: he must prove to himself its value, where the key word is 'to prove' Education today is flawed. Its rationalistic approach forgets that an existential commitment is a necessary condition for a genuine experience of truth, and therefore for conviction to exist. We cannot understand reality unless 'we are in it.'²¹

It is important to understand this passage is not simply about making the educational proposal more suitable or more in keeping with young persons' legitimate aspirations to "autonomy." The significance of what Giussani is saying here is much more profound.

²⁰Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 18–19.

²¹*Ibid.*, 68–69.

He is talking about acknowledging the ultimate structure of the relationship between the I and reality. This structure is such that, if the human person's freedom doesn't enter into play, his or her access to truth is denied. Indeed, if truth is the event in which reality and the I meet, and if that event takes place always and solely in the sign, ultimately it is impossible to know the real (truth) without a *decision*.²²

Giussani, quoting the biblical scholar Heinrich Schlier, writes the following: "The ultimate, unique sense of an event, and thus the very truth of the event, will communicate itself only and always when the subject experiencing the event gives himself up to it, all the while trying to understand it." He adds: "An event reveals itself to those who actively experience it."²³

Thus the risk of education opens the student up to the greatest creativity by giving him the possibility to "become [a] supreme artist, able to touch the face of Christ and make it come alive, and with [his] mere touch, make everything . . . a sign of his mysterious presence."²⁴

Tradition, authority, totality of the real (or reality as event), involvement or personal verification of the educational hypothesis: these are the elements that make up what we have defined as integral experience, a cornerstone, in our view, of Giussani's educational proposal.

4. *The educative dialogue*

How do these constitutive elements of the integral experience that founds the educative process play themselves out? In this context, Giussani introduces the topic of *dialogue* between educator and student.²⁵

Martin Buber, who with Ebner and Rosenzweig is counted among the masters of dialogical thought, says that authentic

²²In my view, a fundamental text in this sense is *Decisione per l'esistenza*, now published in id., *Alla ricerca del volto umano* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1995³), 95–115.

²³Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 24.

²⁴Ibid., 44.

²⁵Cf. ibid., 86–97; 112–115. On the same topic see Giussani, *Avvenimento di libertà*, [Marietti, 1820], (Genoa, 2002), 52.

dialogue is a “profound exchange with the ungraspable real”²⁶ (it is not for nothing that one of the key categories in Giussani’s texts is that of *mystery*). Buber’s definition of dialogue puts bite into what we have said about reality as an event. In fact, to say dialogue is an educative environment is to say that it is always an *exchange* between the *I* (the educator who proposes, and proposes himself), the *you* (the person to be educated who is introduced to total reality) and the very *reality* that can never be mechanically grasped because of its character as sign. There is no true dialogue if the freedom of the educator and the student does not come into play in ceaseless comparison with the real. If only one of these three factors were lacking, the educational triptych would inevitably be defective. If the freedom of the educator and the student, which must come into full play, were missing, the dialogue would become essentially monologue; if the reference to reality were missing, the path to experience would be blocked.

This concept of dialogue, which “is a function of the universality and totality to which a person is destined,”²⁷ turns out to be the same phenomenon of *traditio* understood as the chance to “have an experience of the old as new and as self-renewing through transplantation to a new terrain, a transplantation that makes the old into a principle of new developments.”²⁸

Underlying this idea of dialogue is a quite definite conception of the relation between truth and freedom: the one transmitted by Christianity.²⁹ It is useful to recall its fundamental features. In the Judeo-Christian perspective, Truth is a living and personal truth. It is not an idea, nor is it the pure fruit of a purely theoretical inquiry.

²⁶M. Buber, *Dialogo*, in *Il principio dialogico e altri saggi* (San Paolo: Cimisello Balsamo, 1993), 206.

²⁷Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 94.

²⁸R. Brague, *Il futuro dell’Occidente* (Milan: Rusconi, 1998), 43. In this text the French philosopher Rémi Brague argues that the originality and strength of the West that grew out of the Roman-Christian matrix consist in the principle of *secondariness*.

²⁹I have dealt with this topic in: A. Scola, *Libertà, verità e salvezza*, in *Unicità e universalità di Gesù Cristo*, ed. M. Serretti; *In dialogo con le religioni* (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo, 2001), 11–16.; id., “Quale fondamento? Note introduttive” *Rivista Internazionale di Teologia e Cultura. Communio*, no. 180 (2001) n. 6, 14–28. For an English translation, see “Which Foundation? Introductory Notes,” *Communio* 28, no. 3 (2000): 549–567.

It would be interesting, if we had the time here, to work out a differentiated judgment about the trajectory of modern conceptualistic intellectualism in the West and to show how even contemporary problematicism and nihilism are only apparently contradictory results of the *mens* that reduces truth to mere conceptual elaboration.³⁰

Truth, therefore, is not an idea. Further, in the person and historical event of the Son of God made man, who died and rose for us, one sees how Jesus Christ, the living and personal Truth, without losing anything of His absoluteness, chose the path of human freedom to make Himself present in history. The more Truth communicates itself, the more freedom is called into play. The more Truth pro-poses itself, the more freedom is pro-voked, called forth. In this “dizzying” self-offering to freedom, Truth goes so far as to let itself be crucified by freedom.³¹ And His victory in the Resurrection is a glorious victory, paid for at a dear price, precisely in order to safeguard human freedom.

With Jesus Christ and with Christianity, the principle of *difference in unity* that lives in the mystery of the Trinity passes over, by virtue of the Incarnation, into history and becomes, according to the law of analogy, a principle for understanding and appreciating every difference. Difference is not only tolerated but exalted, because it is kept in unity by the Truth that reaches down to the *ultima thule* of human experience and so prevents even the most radical difference from degenerating into a more or less violent seed of dissolution.

This brings out the full positivity of the role the other plays in the experience of the I. The other, who, as Levinas affirms, “does not endure judgment, he immediately precedes me, I owe him obedience,”³² “imposes” himself on my life as a beneficent presence that continually urges it to make space for the difference, for the “vanishing point” we mentioned earlier. In Giussani’s coherent and

³⁰“Second-level” elaboration—subordinated to experience—but still always necessary: nothing and no one, in no historical epoch, will ever spare the human person and humanity what Hegel called “the effort of the concept”!

³¹“The fact that Christ died for us means that he is there, and he does not withdraw from any of the circumstances that touch us or from any of our ways of acting. He is the mercy and the goodness that in the end shall prevail over us” (Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 38–39).

³²E. Lévinas, *Tra noi. Saggi sul pensare-all’altro* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1998), 253.

differentiated pedagogical proposal, the “other” takes the form of the community, indeed, of the Christian community, which Giussani sees as an essential condition for the full self-affirmation of freedom.³³

6. Experience, freedom, and risk

On the basis of a structured hierarchy of the foregoing elements, Don Giussani’s concept of education rises towards its summit: freedom. Significantly, from the very beginning of *The Risk of Education* Giussani affirms: “we are at the mercy of the quicksand of freedom.”³⁴ This statement could at first sight seem completely obvious. Instead, the way Giussani develops it is absolutely singular and, to my knowledge, unique. Giussani, in fact, does not identify the apex of the educative proposal with an abstractly-conceived freedom understood as the dynamic synthesis of intelligence and will; nor with freedom as an inevitably necessary decision, but rather with the *experience of risk* that is intrinsic to freedom. The centrality of the theme is required by the author’s choice of the book’s title—a true *best-seller*—*The Risk of Education*.

In what does this risk of education consist? Giussani describes it starting from a famous episode in the life of Newman.

³³This conception underlying the *educative dialogue* brings Giussani to some important considerations about today’s mentality. Giussani is especially critical of the confusion between dialogue and compromise. “To take as a point of departure what we have in common with the other does not necessarily mean that we say the same things as the other, although we may use the same words . . . there is a different form in the words we use . . . in our way of perceiving, feeling, or facing things. What we have in common with the other can be found not so much in his ideas as in his innate structure, in those human needs and original standards that make the other a human being just like me.” Giussani then goes on to uncover the deeply rooted error that favors the regnant idea of dialogue—a mistaken idea of ‘openness’ and of ‘democracy,’ that equates *any version of relativism with “democracy.”* Dialogue implies a critical awareness of what I am. “This is the kind of openness proper to a Christian consciousness. It has its roots in the belief that human nature is one—one origin, one set of values, one destiny—beyond any ideology. It believes that the affirmation of the person, and especially of human freedom, is the guiding principle of all human relationships. It follows that democracy cannot be founded internally on a common worldview, but on charity—love for the other that finds its sufficient reason in a person’s relationship to God” (*The Risk of Education*, 96–97).

³⁴*Ibid.*, 33.

When he was fourteen, Newman was struck by the intuition that there were “two only supreme and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator.”³⁵ If the Mystery—God, the “sublime neutral,” i.e., in the end, the hypothesis that explains the real—is the most obvious implication of the human gaze’s intuition, why do many have difficulty perceiving this “evidence”?³⁶ What Giussani calls the experience of risk breaks in at this point. Since the mystery always gives itself in the sign, the interpretation of the sign is “like Odysseus navigating the ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules.”³⁷ The risk is not irrationality, but arises as a consequence of the split between reason and will. The reasons for recognizing the truth are not lacking, but they remain abstract, they do not move the will, the energy for adhesion to being: one sees the reasons but does not move. The phenomenon is extremely concrete. Giussani calls it experience and with his pedagogical genius illustrates it with a delightful episode from his youth, when he attempted a very difficult mountain climb for the first time. I leave you the pleasure of reading it directly.³⁸ At the heart of freedom—which reaches the highest pitch of education because it concerns the meaning of life as a whole—the person to be educated has the experience of risk: a fear of affirming being. This fear is curious, according to Giussani, because it is extraneous to, and in contradiction with, human nature itself.³⁹

On this basis, one can understand why the experience of risk also touches the educator, who is called for this reason to expose himself (i.e., to reveal himself and put himself at risk). “To educate is to communicate oneself.”⁴⁰ If, in fact, tradition is the gift of the hypothesis of truth in the very person of the educator, this educator cannot but be a *witness*. To introduce the word *witness* at this point is not in the first instance to appeal to the educator’s moral consistency as a condition for an adequate education.⁴¹

³⁵Cf. J. H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, chapter three, 108.

³⁶Cf. Giussani, *Il senso religioso*, 179.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 180.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 180–181.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 182.

⁴⁰Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 110.

⁴¹“The teacher doesn’t primarily need to have a consistent practical ethic; the

Obviously, we do not want to devalue the persuasive power of such consistency. Augustine is surely right that “orators who say things that they do not practice are useful, it is true, to many, but doing what they say would be useful to many more.”⁴² We simply want to point out that the logic of witnessing is proof of the relationship between man and reality. And this logic is evident also in the experience of risk that lies at the heart of every educative act. In fact, every act by which one’s consciousness “intends” the real is, by nature, an act of witness. Even within the most banal affirmation of reality there shines the ‘vanishing point’ that redirects the gaze towards Being (*esse*). And Being, while making itself present in each individual being, at the same time never allows itself to be seized (ontological *dif-ference*). To know a being—even the most banal—is always to give witness to Being.

The educator is thus a witness because he cannot not expose himself in the first person in order to respond to the call of truth. “To educate means to develop the child’s self-consciousness, the feeling he has of being responsible in the face of something greater than he is.”⁴³ When he acts in this way, the educator loves the other gratuitously, for the other’s own sake. He does not make claims on him, nor does he make any calculations for his response. Even on this level, education demands the risk of the educator’s freedom.

The experience of risk that passes through the educator’s and the student’s freedom makes it clear that “the first condition inherent in education, whether that condition be conscious or merely implicit, is a sense of detachment and respect. It is a sense of fear and trembling in front of the mystery that dwells in the student.”⁴⁴ Being an educator turns out to be a dramatic task: the temptation to possess, to refuse to let the student be *fully other*, and *free*, continually threatens the educator’s task.⁴⁵ Accepting the risk

teacher needs logical consistency. Even better, there must be a coherence of ideas, a logic in the teacher himself. In this way the call to a principle becomes a reference point for daily life” (ibid., 15).

⁴²Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* IV, 27, 60.

⁴³Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 129.

⁴⁴Ibid., 125.

⁴⁵As often happens, it is the poet who best manages to express the fascinating, poignant drama of human experience. In this sense I would like to quote Charles

of the other person's freedom, in effect, is the most radical test in the life of educators: one would always want to spare the other pain and evil.⁴⁶

How can this risk be overcome without plunging freedom into a frustration that leads to skepticism and despair? For Giussani, the phenomenon of the community is the *soil* that doesn't replace personal decision, and yet transforms the experience of risk into a true exaltation of freedom.⁴⁷ A child stops on the threshold of a dark room. If his mother takes him by the hand, he crosses it with buoyant spirits. Thus educator and student can "travel together, and it is on this path together, defined by the ultimate goal of destiny, that they learn what the path is. This is the explicit risk involved in accepting the call and the challenge of that definition of humanity, of that mystery Who urges us to recognize that he has created us."⁴⁸

6. *Erunt semper docibiles Dei*

I would like to conclude with a passage from Isaiah cited in the Gospel of John, and which I will quote in the vivid Latin of the

Péguy who, attempting to enter into the mind and heart of God as he faces man's freedom, speaks these disarmingly powerful words: "Like a father who teaches his son to swim in the river's current and who is divided between two feelings./ Because on the one hand if he always supports him and supports him too much the child will get attached and will never learn to swim./ But in addition, if he does not support him at the right moment the child will take some bad gulps . . . / Such is the mystery of man's freedom, says God, and of my governance of him and his freedom./ If I support him too much, he is no longer free. And if I do not support him enough, he sinks./ If I support him too much, I eliminate his freedom, if I don't support him enough, I eliminate his salvation . . . / This creature's freedom is the most beautiful reflection there is in the world of the Creator's freedom" (Charles Péguy, *Lui e' qui. Pagine scelte* [Milan: BUR, 1997], 359–360).

⁴⁶It is difficult not to remember in this context the story of David who cries over the body of his son Absalom. After having received the notice of the death of his son, who had turned traitor, "he was struck by a tremor, he ran out onto the floor above the door and wept; in tears he said: 'My son! Absalom my son, my son Absalom! If only I were dead in your place, Absalom my son, my son'" (2 Sam 19:1). David's lament for the death of his wretch of a son is perhaps one of the most beautiful expressions of paternal love, which does not grow faint even when confronted with evidence of the most horrendous betrayal. Is this not perhaps a reflection of God's fatherhood in relation to sinful man?

⁴⁷Giussani, *Il senso religioso*, 182–184.

⁴⁸Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 37.

Vulgate: “*Erunt semper docibiles Dei.*”⁴⁹ This statement reveals the constitutive character of all growth, which is the inescapable condition of life. In fact, what no longer grows, dies.

The citation from the Gospel does not simply point out the permanent necessity of discipleship (it would be better to say sonship). It also suggests the attitude with which we should daily face our educative task. Whenever the educator enters into relationship with the person to be educated, full of fear and trembling because he is aware of the mysterious encounter of freedoms involved in his work, dependence on God (poverty of spirit) will enable him to make the decision of his personal freedom for the ideal that sustains his life: “that feeling we have about our self and the world which has its origin, is realized, and finds its fulfillment in the mystery of the Christ event.”⁵⁰

But above all, these words give us a glimpse of the precious fruit of the education brought forth by the mature communion between educator and student. The two together, docile toward God in the human adventure, share the same ideal: “*The fact that Christ has come . . . implies a life of communion.*”⁵¹

Don Giussani writes: “Now educator and student are two adults, two equal members of the human race . . . thus it will be possible to have the kind of life that as time goes by maintains its youthful attitude, remains open to learning, and is filled with wonder and moved by things,” in which “time allows itself to be invaded by the power of eternity and to be continuously enriched by it.”⁵²—*Translated by Michael Waldstein and Damian Bacich.*

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⁴⁹Cf. Is 54:13; Jn 6:45.

⁵⁰Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 115.

⁵¹Cf. *ibid.*, 123.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 85.