

Crederere, 4 December 2016

Freedom, a crucial challenge for our faith

Interview with Father Julián Carrón
by Gerolamo Fazzini

“The crucial question today is how to make Christian life attractive in a world where the supreme value is freedom. Faith, in fact, is not communicated by compulsion, but by ‘attraction.’ As the Pope continually says.”

Father Julián Carrón has guided Communion and Liberation since 2005, designated by Father Giussani to succeed him a few months before Giussani’s death. Since then, the Spanish priest has lived the complex and fascinating adventure of leading the Movement toward a rediscovery of its original charism, in a troubled time, and has had, at times, to confront resistances and tensions even from within the Movement, to the point that some have accused him of squandering the inheritance of “Gius.”

This interview with Father Carrón comes alongside of the publication of a new version, by Edizioni San Paolo, of a text of Father Giussani from 1973, *Dalla liturgia vissuta. Una testimonianza*. [*The lived liturgy. A testimony.*]

How did you choose this book?

“For a long time, we reflected on the possibility of republishing this book, but it seemed that it is still a useful and current way of introducing the faithful with simplicity to the liturgy. Father Giussani couldn’t conceive of a Christian proposal without the liturgy as the wellspring of the life of faith. All of us are invited to enter, thanks to the liturgy, into the mystery of God and to draw from there the necessary energy to live the newness of Christianity in our daily life.”

Isn’t the republication of this book a sign of a “spiritualistic” temptation, a flight from concrete problems?

“It is exactly the opposite. Only a person who has his roots in the mystery of Christ can be a different presence, a sign of newness in the world. Without this origin, mysterious but absolutely real, we Christians would be just like everybody else.”

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI, at the Heiligenkreuz Abbey in Austria, said: “There, where in reflecting on the liturgy, we ask ourselves only how to make it more attractive, interesting, and beautiful, the game is already lost.” Still, it is a common experience that often the liturgy risks losing the ability to speak to the people of today...

“This is a challenge to the educative capacity of the Church. One who perceives the value of the liturgy doesn’t need to add anything to make it interesting. Father Giussani introduced us to the language of the liturgy with sobriety in its gestures, taking care of all its details, especially the singing.”

It is striking to read this phrase in Giussani’s introduction to the volume: “Instead of understanding the word of God as a new language that disrupts our wisdom, we have made the word of God the support of our wisdom.” Is this a present temptation even in the Church and in CL today?

“It is a risk that presents itself in every age. Each believer lives in a precise historical context and absorbs a culture, a mentality with which he approaches the word of God. The result is that, sometimes, we are tempted to use the word of God to support our mental schemes, instead of the contrary happening, that is, that we are the ones “displaced” by the word. The Church herself prevents us from reducing the word of God to the mentality of the age.”

To what “conversion of the heart”, in your opinion, is Christ calling the Church today? And CL? You said in an interview last summer: “We have put the pertinence of the faith to the demands of life in first place. I prefer testimony to militancy”...

“The word ‘testimony’ is more and more present in theological reflection today, as a way to define the permanent mode of Christianity. We are in front of an unheard-of historical situation, ‘a change of epoch,’ as the Pope says. The crucial question today is how to make Christian faith and life attractive, in a world where the supreme value is freedom: there is no other way to communicate the truth if not by passing through human freedom. This is the lesson from the Council. The truth does not need something outside of it. And the faith is not communicated by compulsion, but by ‘attraction.’ This means a return to the origins of Christian experience.”

This, however, comes with a price: to return to the origins means accepting the risk of being a minority, of counting for nothing...

“For a long time, as Christians, we have been a minority. As Benedict XVI says, we need to accept the ‘subtle’ method of God: why, after the victory of the Resurrection, did Christ only reveal Himself to a few Apostles? And again: Why did the history of salvation start with Abraham, and why did God not show Himself, instead, to the powerful of the earth? Many times, this subtle method of God unsettles us. But if we don’t allow ourselves to be challenged by this, we will always try to justify our strategies. Just like Peter, who didn’t want Jesus to go up to Jerusalem, or who pulled out his sword when the Master was about to be arrested. Therefore, either we identify ourselves with God’s way of acting, or being a minority will be lived like a ‘handicap,’ instead of as an occasion to share with everyone the grace of life lived in company with Christ.”

Last April, you wrote to the Movement, explaining that, after having personally met with Pope Francis, you felt “full of amazement at having perceived more clearly the profound consonance between Pope Francis and Father Giussani.” What did you mean?

“All those who took part in the encounter of the Movement with Pope Francis on 7 March 2015 and heard his words, were able to touch with their hands how familiar certain expressions of Father Giussani are to Pope Francis. For us, it is a joy to see that a way of conceiving of Christianity that was so dear to Father Giussani coincides with what the Pope proposes. Now if we are able to live all of this faithfully is another story. In fact: it is a wager.”

The theme of the peripheries, so dear to Francis, is often found in the pages of *Traces*, and was also evoked in many of the encounters during the last Rimini Meeting ...

“The category of ‘place’ is central in the experience of the Movement. After all, CL was born in a school and then spread to many different places. We have often been accused of taking people away from the parishes, when instead CL went and found people right where they lived. Father Giussani invited us to live the faith in reality, not in ‘protected’ environments. Today, hearing

Pope Francis speak about ‘peripheries’ and of a Church that ‘goes out,’ we are called back to the original charism.”

Father Carrón, have you ever had—as a believer, even before as a priest—crises, doubts, or questions that remained unresolved in front of facts that reason cannot comprehend?

“It is impossible that, in life, a person does not come up against questions like that. Even I have not been spared any of the drama that every man faces. A few years ago my dad died, and I remember that, looking at his body, I asked myself: ‘Is this everything?’ I suddenly thought about the disciples, about what their gaze would have been in my position: I think they wouldn’t have been able to avoid remembering that they had seen, risen and alive, the Friend whom they had laid in the tomb.”

What causes you the most suffering?

“The changes that are happening in the life of the Movement and of the Church unsettle many and not everyone reacts in the same way. But I am consoled when I think that this is part of God’s design, that He calls someone to show us certain things, and that sometimes there are people who do not understand. This can, at times, cause me to suffer misunderstandings in the life of the Movement. Personally, I live all this in peace, even if certain things upset me. But I have the good fortune of traveling around Italy and outside Italy, and I find myself repaid with so many significant encounters.

Is there an episode, an encounter that has been a sign for you?

“My Ugandan friend, Rose Busingye, comes to mind. She works in Kampala with women who are sick with AIDS. At the beginning, she thought that the priority was to respond to their need by offering medicine, but she was blocked by the fact that the women didn’t take their medicine. Something else was needed: for people to want to live. They needed a gaze that made them discover their value and their dignity. It was time for an overturning of approach: we think that what is more ‘concrete’ would be the most effective thing, but that is because we have reduced human nature, its desire for fullness. But man—every man—has need of an adequate reason to live.”