

“Let us be witnesses to love”

This evening, Fr. Julián Carrón will speak at the Bergamo Congress Center. “Today, Christianity enters the arena of religious diversity.” “Everyone wants to draw closer to the Pope because they recognize in him a fitting way to live the faith.”

Interview by Carlo Dignola

The word that Fr. Julián Carrón repeats very often is “beauty.” President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation since February 2005, when Msgr. Luigi Giussani died, Carrón has nothing of Giussani’s gruff, incisive, even provocative character. Instead, with his Spanish accent, the double consonants that slip in his mouth, his steady tone of voice—rarely using exclamations—he says the same things with the faithfulness of a son, adapting them and rediscovering them in a historical situation that is changing rapidly.

This evening, Carrón speaks at Bergamo’s John XXIII Congress Center to celebrate 40 years of the Movement in this land that has remained Catholic in a very deeply rooted, somewhat traditionalist way, but that has always been open to new expressions in the Catholic world that have often, not by chance, passed through here.

Fr. Carrón, what is this celebration about?

For us, this moment means celebrating the faithfulness of God, His boundless love for our nothingness, a love that not even our betrayal has blocked. As the prophet Isaiah said, “Even if your father and mother abandon you, I will never abandon you.” This is what we feel deep inside. We cannot celebrate anything without remembering a famous invitation Giussani made in 1994 and that has remained a point of reference for us: “As we go on maturing, we are a spectacle for ourselves and, God willing, for others, too. A spectacle, in other words, of limitation and betrayal, and therefore of humiliation, and at the same time of inexhaustible certainty in the power of grace that is given to us and is renewed every morning.” Therefore, this celebration is a thanksgiving for the God’s faithfulness and a prayer that He not abandon His people.

What is the purpose of a movement in the Church? Aren’t parishes already enough? What do you think is the contribution CL has made in these years, and that it can make within the life of the Church?

A charism, as indicated by the word itself, is a gift of the Spirit that makes life more persuasive, more attractive, as Pope John Paul II said. It is a way God continues the dialogue with women and men, continues to take initiative according to an absolutely new modality, always surprising even for those of us who participate in it. In this moment in time, Pope Francis is inviting all of us Catholics to go to the “existential peripheries” of the world, to reach out to women and men. We have this concern in our DNA: we have always desired to live faith in the various spheres of our everyday lives. The Pope is pushing Christians to make themselves present everywhere, not just in the sphere of the parishes—which is already beautiful and useful—but in all spheres. Unfortunately, our contemporaries often do not even approach the parishes. Whether we live our faith in a movement, parish, or an association of any type, if we are not present everywhere, these people will not have the possibility of meeting Christ today.

Pope Francis is the first to reach out beyond the limited circle of his sheep...

Yes, this seems to me to be the great invitation that he is extending to the whole Church with his personal way of doing things: to be aware that all women and men deserve to be reached by the beauty and tenderness of God, Whom we are fortunate to have encountered. The Pope witnesses to this in every way, even in the way he looks at each person when he is surrounded by tens of thousands of people. Everyone wants to draw close to him because there is something in his way of living the faith that people recognize as adequate to their needs.

You spoke of the “attraction” of Jesus. Perhaps today many non-Christians sense it, but when it comes to submitting to all the rules and suggestions of the Church...

What conquered us was precisely this attraction; we did nothing more than let ourselves be drawn in, in order not to lose what attracts us in the encounter with Christ. The Church's claim is nothing other than Christ's claim that this beauty be important for the totality of existence, and not just for some of its aspects: that it may illuminate, make intense and profound even the most insignificant everyday moments of life, so that everything becomes full of meaning, overflowing with beauty and gusto, as in a love relationship. Fr. Giussani always repeated for us Romano Guardini's famous line: “In the experience of a great love...everything becomes an event within its sphere.” What person would not desire this?

For people today, Christianity seems like a somewhat old, outdated religion. There are more desirable ones (Buddhism, New Age...). Don't you feel a bit unsuited to the times?

People must embark on their own journey and pursue their own road all the way. This is the only way they will be able to verify, in a profound way, Christianity's capacity to respond to all their needs. Today, Christianity enters the arena of this religious diversity. It has no precedence over the other religions. On a profound level, this is the fascination of our times: Christianity must show its reasonableness in the midst of the plurality of forms in which we live. This way, people will be able to compare the experience they have chosen and what they see testified to by Christians.

John Paul II cried, “Do not be afraid” to turn to Christ. Today, perhaps Pope Francis is also saying, “Do not be afraid” to his own: do not be afraid in a world in which you are now in the minority.

Certainly. This is why it is very important that the Christian live an experience; Fr. Giussani always taught us that faith must be a present experience, in which I find confirmation of its relevance. Otherwise, faith will not be able to hold up in a world in which everything says the opposite. The challenge and the dramatic beauty of this moment in history is this: that we Christians have no other support, no other advantage and foothold than the experience of beauty we have in the faith, together with our sisters and brothers in faith.

Is this general exaltation about Pope Francis a passing fad, or does it in some way touch faith in Christ?

It seems to me that, more than a fad, it is a sign of our need—that of believers and non-believers, alike, as demonstrated for example in the dialogue between Pope Bergoglio and Eugenio Scalfari—to be reached by the mercy and tenderness of God through a face, a human gaze, that makes God so close that it is easy to recognize Him. In this sense, the response to Pope Francis already has to do with the faith, which is nothing other than the acknowledgment of a presence that responds to the expectation of man. What is Christianity if not the Word that is made flesh, that becomes palpable, and through this carnality brings the tenderness and mercy of God close to women and men? It seems to me that people today, even those apparently the farthest from the cultural or even religious point of view, sense this in Pope Francis.

How should Christians behave in a world in which they are clearly in the minority? Should they try to exploit, as best they can, the profits that derive from their position?

First of all, everyone should realize that this strategy of hegemony, if we ever thought it was the right one, has shown itself to be a complete failure, even if many positions and many places of power may have been achieved. The Christian has only one possibility, because his strength lies not in holding in his hands any kind of power but in being a witness to the newness of Christ who entered into history, precisely to fascinate and conquer the heart of people. The light does not shine any less because our prestige has diminished; the light shines no less in the darkness. People today are struck when they encounter Christians who transmit this unknown life to them. There is no other way than testimony—and I hope we Christians have finally learned this for good—that is: radiating the beauty of Christ. There is no other method.

Isn't it a bit complicated to be Christian today? Too demanding?

It only seems complicated because what we sometimes call Christianity today is nothing other than its reduction to ethics. Instead, if it is a beauty that attracts, as this Pope, as well as Benedict XVI and John Paul II, show us, then it is simple. We just need to let ourselves be won over. Even Scalfari is happy that the Pope writes to him and meets with him. He went quickly to meet him when Bergoglio telephoned. This does not remove the drama of following or not following what has happened to each of us, but in and of itself, it is very simple.”