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Religion

Interview

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“Francis’ Witness is Greater than Any Discourse”

Fr. Julián Carrón affirms that “everything can be accompanied by Christ’s presence.”

María Serrano – Madrid

The big problem for today’s world is not a theoretical question, but an existential one. It is not, “Who is right?” but “How can one live?” The Catholic movement Communion and Liberation seeks to respond to this question. An ecclesial reality born in Italy in 1954, the Movement attempts to take on the challenges of our time and the Christian education of its members in order to collaborate with the Church’s mission in all spheres of society. Since the death of its founder, Msgr. Luigi Giussani, Fr. Julián Carrón presides over this movement throughout the world.

The theme of Communion and Liberation’s “Beginning Day” this year is a question: How is a presence born?

It is born of the encounter with someone so absolutely fascinating for one’s life that one cannot do without this person when looking at reality. It’s like when you fall in love, and all of your life is determined by the presence of the beloved. You are in reality with this newness inside—in all that you touch, in all that you see, in all that happens to you.

Is this encounter possible for everyone?

Yes. The example is Mary Magdalene, an unknown person who, in the encounter with Jesus, discovers who she is, as well as the possibility that she can live life with an intensity that she could never have imagined.

The biography of Fr. Giussani, the founder of the Movement, was just published. What was your relationship with him like?

It had distinct phases, because I lived in Madrid when I first met the Movement, so I rarely saw him. Later, the relationship intensified, and eventually he asked me to come to Italy to help him in the leadership of the Movement. That was a total surprise for me.

When he was asked why people listened to him and were waiting for him, Fr. Giussani responded, “Because I believe in what I say.” Why do people listen to you?

I too try to communicate what I believe, what I live, and what helps me to live. I have no other desire than to live. I have only one problem, and it is the same one that all human beings have: to live.

How has the Movement of Communion and Liberation grown in Spain? What does it have to contribute within our situation today?

As in any part of the world, it must contribute the most precious thing that it has found: the possibility that Jesus Christ, whatever the circumstance, can be a source of newness for living everything—from family relationships to work, unemployment, or illness. Everything can be accompanied by Christ's presence, which makes all things new.

Fr. Giussani wanted to propose a Christian journey that was truly human. Is this proposal still valid today?

As more years pass, this journey increasingly reveals itself to be meaningful, because Giussani did something that is difficult to come across: he got involved in the lives of some young people for years, so that they could verify whether or not his Christian proposal could respond to life's needs. And this allowed us to see with our own eyes what it meant to live life in the faith. This is what fascinated us.

Is the union of theoretical thought and personal experience that Fr. Giussani proposed possible? In what way can attention to daily life be the occasion for an encounter with Christ?

Fr. Giussani always started from experience, because reality, he said, becomes transparent for us in experience, just as we understand what love is, not through a theory or a discourse, but by falling in love. Thus, it's easy—life is easy, Christianity is easy—because it is an experience within everyone's reach. One must be conscious of what his experience means in order to be able to grow in this awareness of himself and of reality.

To cite Dostoyevsky, “Can a cultured man, a European of our day, believe in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ?”

Absolutely! But the Christian faith will only interest those who do not give up their reason or their freedom, who respect all of the need of their reason, and who do not content themselves with anything less than finding a complete response: a true meaning of life that holds up to any circumstance, with a fullness that can satiate the human heart.

Pope Francis, in his response to Eugenio Scalfari in *La Repubblica*, affirmed the need to engage in “a sincere and comprehensive dialogue.” Is this type of dialogue possible?

It is possible, because all men, as both Scalfari and the Pope demonstrated, desire to find a meaning for life, to find a response that helps us to enter into a relationship with all of life. Only if we do not censor this desire, this need that we each have, will we always be able to find people who have the same desire that we do.

You say, “Faithfulness to this desire that constitutes us is what stimulates men to true dialogue.” Is this desire present in all men?

Yes, we all find it in the depths of our being; it is what constitutes us. No human being exists who is without the need for truth, beauty, justice, happiness, and fulfillment. He wouldn't be human.

What does this need have to do with Christianity?

Christianity proposes itself precisely as a complete response to this need. Thus, nothing could be more interesting for someone who has this desire and this need for happiness than to be able to encounter a worthy response.

The Pope affirms that his faith was born from a “personal encounter with Jesus,” and that “without the Church, I would not have been able to encounter Him.” To what extent can we say that the one cannot be understood without the other?

We cannot know Jesus except in the Church. He came to us through her; He would be an unknown character if it had not been for the witnesses who transmitted the surprise and the newness that they met in Jesus. Like all historical facts—and Christianity is a historical fact—it cannot be known if not through its witnesses.

What do you believe to be the key to the leadership that Pope Francis demonstrates?

His genius lies in his capacity to witness, in an absolutely simple way, to what Christianity is today, relying only on the power of his personal testimony. Many times, this seems too little to us, but the Pope is showing us that the power of witness is greater than any discourse.

Biographical Profile

Julián Carrón was born in Extremadura, Spain, in 1950. He was ordained a priest by the diocese of Madrid in 1975, and obtained a doctorate in Theology in 1984, after having worked in the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem and having completed a year of research at the Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C.). He was a professor of various subjects at the San Dámaso Theology Faculty, though his specialization is in Sacred Scripture, a subject about which he has written numerous works. On March 19, 2005, the central Diaconia of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation designated him President of the Fraternity, following the death of Fr. Giussani.