

Carrón: Together with the Pope on the Outskirts of Humanity

*“The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* urges us to be a missionary Church”*

By Giorgio Paolucci

Sixty years ago, Father Luigi Giussani re-proposed the challenge of Christianity at the Berchet High School in Milan, as a reasonable and exciting response to the needs of every human being. After Giussani's death in 2005, Father Julián Carrón took over the leadership of the movement that he founded, Communion and Liberation.

In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis indicates the path for the Church in the coming years. Fr. Carrón, you lead the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. What does the Movement have to learn from these indications?

We are challenged to renew the personal encounter with Christ, every day and unceasingly. The origin of the “pastoral and missionary conversion” urged by the document lies here. Pope Francis clearly states that the source of missionary zeal is a person who lives the grateful memory of Christ and wants to share the joy provoked by the Gospel. He indicates the point of origin, asking that the announcement center on the essential.

The Pope writes that Christianity does not have only one cultural model at its disposal and that, “while remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, [it] will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root.” How does this happen in your movement, which has spread to many countries?

Our community's presence in 80 countries, in very diverse contexts, and the friendships born with people from the Orthodox, Anglican, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist traditions, witness to the fact that, when one focuses on the essential, he can enter into dialogue with the heart of every man, at any latitude. Moving events occur, like this one: an African woman was unable to have children, and her husband's family pressured him to abandon her, in accordance with local tradition. But the man, seeing how joyful his wife was in the experience that she lived in the CL community, resisted the pressure, because he did not want to deprive himself of the joy of faith that she witnessed to him, and which was greater than the impossibility of having children. It is a small, and yet big, example of how Christianity values and exalts all of humanity.

The value of experience as a privileged vehicle for the transmission of faith is emphasized in *Evangelii Gaudium*. In the pedagogy of CL, too, experience plays a fundamental role. However, criticism has come from many sources, particularly in environments tied to traditionalism, regarding the risk that emphasizing personal experience will overshadow

rigorous reference to doctrine, and therefore represents an attack on truth. What do you think?

Pope Francis is consistent with his predecessors John Paul II and Paul VI, when they affirm, “People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories” (*Redemptoris Missio* 42; cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 21, 41, 76). Only if man experiences the pertinence of the truth of faith to life’s needs, can he find adequate reasons to adhere to it. In Christianity, truth became flesh so that man could experience it and, in this way, find the motives for a fully reasonable adhesion to it. This is what happened to the first disciples: Andrew and John didn’t know who that man was, but they followed Him because of the human correspondence that they discovered in the encounter with Him. No one had ever looked at them like that before!

Francis emphasizes that the movements are a richness for the Church, and that they are generated by the Spirit in order to evangelize all environments. He adds that “it is very beneficial” for them not to lose touch with the parishes “and to integrate themselves gladly into the organic pastoral ministry of the particular Church.” How do members of CL live this relationship, which in the past has been the cause of misunderstandings and conflicts?

The Pope is asking us to go out toward the existential outskirts to meet everyone, believers and nonbelievers, without waiting for them to come looking for us. He is setting the first example, with his words and the witness that he offers. CL has arisen and spread in different environments—schools, universities, work, neighborhoods—but members of CL do not snub parishes at all. In the diocese of Milan alone, there are 4,000 CL members involved in various ways: catechism, choirs, athletic organizations, afterschool activities, and educational activities in the parishes. To suggest a contrast or a rivalry between CL and the local churches is something that does not correspond to reality: the task to which the Pope calls everyone is collaboration in the one mission of the Church, to go to meet people in order to witness to the joy of the Gospel. We all have to shift the focal point.

The first document written entirely by Francis is dedicated to evangelization, and it was signed on the same day that the Year of Faith, called for by Benedict XVI, ended. Is there, then, a strong continuity between two popes who many people continue to describe as very different from one another?

What unites Benedict and Francis is passion for Christ. The former intercepted the necessity of starting over from the fundamentals; the latter took over by insisting on missionary urgency. Both have a clear perception that faith can no longer be taken for granted, and that at the origin of mission lies the need for personal conversion. Francis spells it out clearly at the beginning of *Evangelii Gaudium* (no. 7): “I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: ‘Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.’” Here, the unity of their intent is evident—within the difference of temperament and sensibility that obviously remains (and that is always a richness). But, if you’ll excuse me, could anyone who truly knows and lives the Church think otherwise?