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“Close to the wounds of the human person”

*Carrón: with the Pope in the existential peripheries, to testify in new forms to the perennial newness of Christianity*

interview by Giorgio Paolucci

A few days ago, at the Beginning Day of Communion and Liberation in Milan before 19,000 people, with 34,000 others following by satellite link-up from many cities in Italy, he invited the communities of Communion and Liberation to pray “that the next Synod of Bishops may help everyone grow in the awareness of the sacred and inviolable nature of the family and of its beauty in God’s plan,” and to join in the prayer scheduled for Saturday in Saint Peter’s Square and in their own cities. Julián Carrón, President of the Fraternity of CL, sees in the assembly that will open in a few days in the Vatican a great opportunity to “return to the essential, to the newness that Christianity has brought into the world to offer each person a life that is humanly more worthwhile.”

### **What is at the root of the crisis of marriage and the family?**

First of all, it is an anthropological crisis. Before being a problem of the relationship between man and woman, there is the way each person responds to the ancient yet ever new question: who am I? When there is confusion about the “I,” bonds become problematic as well. In an authentic loving relationship, the other is lived as such a great good that she or he is perceived as something divine. This is why Leopardi wrote “Divine ray to my thought appeared / Woman, your beauty.” The woman awakens in the man a desire for fullness, but at the same time she cannot fulfil him; she evokes an expectation that she cannot meet. She is a sign that refers to something beyond, something greater for which each of us is made. The genius of Pavese expressed this well: “What a man seeks in pleasures is the infinite, and no one would ever renounce the hope of attaining this infinity.” The other cannot fulfil the promise he kindled, and this generates dissatisfaction and disappointment. We are made for something greater than the other person, and if we do not realize this, the difficulties that arise within a relationship can become suffocating. This is why Christ came, as authentic response to this inability of the human person to satisfy the desire of the other.

**Ideals such as the indissolubility of marriage and a love that lasts “forever” seem to belong to another era. How can they be experienced again?**

It is not just a problem today. Two thousand years ago, Jesus said, “What God has joined together, no human being must separate,” and the disciples responded, “If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” Therefore, today’s difficulties should not surprise us: even they thought that certain things were humanly impossible. Christ came precisely to make possible what to the human person is impossible. This is why outside the Christian experience, the indissolubility of marriage or a love “forever,” which are desirable for two people who love each other, are in fact perceived as impossible. For that matter, the Church, as far back as the First Vatican Council, said that “the precepts of natural law are not perceived by everyone clearly and immediately. In the present situation sinful man needs grace and revelation so moral and religious truths may be known ‘by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error.’”

**Many come to marriage without adequate awareness of what they are about to do. How can they be helped?**

Those who turn to the Church, at times also in a confused and even contradictory way, do so because they recognize their need and their inability to manage on their own. The problem is the answer that is given. They need to be helped to become increasingly conscious of what they have received through tradition or social customs. The Church must demonstrate that there is a possibility of staying together in a way that is humanly worthwhile, a place where they can find an answer to the difficulties that they will encounter, and that supports them in a journey of maturation. Benedict XVI said, “From the initial attraction and from that ‘feeling good’ with the other, learn to ‘love’ the other and ‘to want the best’ for the other.” Families must find in the ecclesial community a help in this education.

**Does it seem to you that this happens in the Church?**

There are many places and experiences where people are accompanied and supported, and where they experience as possible what appears to be unpopular or humanly impossible. Pope Francis teaches us that it is not enough to repeat correct formulas: you have to stay close to the wounds of the human person, in any condition, in any existential periphery. We must embrace those we encounter, in virtue of the embrace we have received from Christ.

**The Synod will examine the challenges that arrive from a society that is increasingly secularized: forms of co-existence different from marriage, homosexual unions, sex changes,**

**and other things, with the mass-media that fuels the clash between liberals and conservatives in the Church. What criterion should be used to judge and act according to the Gospel?**

The point of departure is to understand that behind many requests there are profoundly human needs: the need for love, the desire for maternity, the search for one's identity. It is at this level that the response must come; there is a work of education to do to help people grasp the profound nature of the needs they feel, and to understand that the remedies called for are inadequate to answer what is at the root of those needs. Fr. Giussani said that "the solution of the problems life sets before us every day does not happen by directly facing the problems, but examining more deeply the nature of the subject who faces them." This goes beyond the conservatism or liberalism in the Church. The Samaritan woman also tried to respond to her thirst for happiness by changing husbands six times, but the thirst remained, so much so that when she encountered Jesus at the well she asked to have "that water" would make her thirst cease. Christians can testify to the many Samaritans of today the fullness that Christ brought to life.

**In the debate that preceded the Synod the dialectic emerged between those who, quoting the Pope, ask us to be merciful first of all, and those who highlight the need to safeguard the truth. What do you think?**

In *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis writes that "we need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness." For this reason the Pope insists that we find "forms and ways to communicate with an understandable language the perennial newness of Christianity." This is what Jesus did with Zacchaeus: His gaze of mercy reawakened in that man the desire for truth, to the point that he converted. This is why it is mistaken to see an opposition between mercy and truth.