

**TGCOM24 – March 10, 2013, 2:00pm**

**“THE SUNDAY INTERVIEW”**

**Alessandro Banfi interviews Fr. Julián Carrón,  
President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation**

ALESSANDRO BANFI. *Greetings to Fr. Julián Carrón, President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. Thank you for being with us..*

JULIÁN CARRÓN. Thank you. It's my pleasure.

*In an article published in La Repubblica, you shed some light on the meaning of Benedict XVI's gesture by calling it a gesture of freedom—that was the key word in your commentary. Can you explain it to us?*

The meaning seems very simple to me. Something like this, a gesture of this caliber, cannot be explained merely by certain factors that seem to be at its origin—courage, difficulty, the Church's situation—because they don't explain one thing: the joy on the Pope's face. This idea came to me when I saw the Pope for the last time, his face resplendent, before the door of Castel Gandolfo was closed. We can give all of the interpretations that we want, but that joyful face remains, and each of us must use this as a measure: if any interpretation can give adequate reasons for that joy.

*So what is the true meaning of this gesture?*

In my opinion, only that there is Someone who fills up the Pope's heart, who makes it overflow with that joy that can be seen on his face. We all have experience of this. It's not a strategy, it's not something that we can give to ourselves, it's not something that we can achieve with a well-thought-out plan. We discover it in ourselves when something so great, so beautiful happens that it fills us up to the point that it shines through on our faces. It's a fullness at the origin of freedom.

*But Ratzinger doesn't have a particularly emotive personality; he says of himself: "I'm not a mystic." His route was a very rational, intellectual one.*

That is why it is necessary to give an adequate explanation for what he did, because he is not a person who is capable of making a decision of this caliber without understanding its importance and consequences; he is not a person whose gestures are not fully informed. Thus, the joy of which I am speaking cannot be reduced to a sentimental issue; it is a joy whose origin is so profound, so rooted in the depths of being. And so I wondered, will anyone ask themselves what Christ means for Joseph Ratzinger, for his person? Because anyone, when he has a true experience of love, can see that what fills life is not a strategy—it is finding himself in front of a presence that, surprisingly, makes him shine. Only if we start from the elementary experience of living can we understand the elementary experience of another. Without this, we stop at our interpretation, and we don't look at what we have in front of us. Because if someone says to us—when he sees us so happy that he cannot help but ask—“What happened to you?” then strategy and courage are not enough to explain it. “Why did you come to work so happy today?” we ask, “What happened to you?” It's something else, it's an Other who is at the origin of that face that one sees on his colleague or friend.

*So what you are saying is that the Pope brought the Church back to reflecting on its nature, on the heart of the issue, that is, on Jesus Christ.*

Exactly. This is what he said to us. The issue is that, in order to be able to understand this, to look at this gesture without reducing it, we have to have had some type of experience. Because we can understand the experience of another if, in some way, we have had an experience of it. Otherwise, we think that we understand it, but we reduce it, and so we have to give other interpretations. Only a person for whom Christ is real, not just a creation of the imagination or a self-conviction, for whom Christianity is not reduced to ethics or an organization, but is a life—as the Pope said the last time that he spoke to the Cardinals: the Church is a life that constantly springs from the presence of Christ—can explain something like this. I understand that many people, not having experienced Christ as something real, think that this cannot be the explanation. I understand this, it's perfectly comprehensible, but it's only when one has this experience—like those who met Christ: “We've never seen anything like this”—that he can understand something like this.

*And yet this gesture also communicates an anxiety for renewal, change, reformation of the Church.* But it seems to me that this is present in everything that he said afterward, because it's as if the gesture contains not only a call for renewal—by saying what the Church is and what Christ is—but it contains the method, as well. If Christ does not become this for us, then we cannot renew the Church with strategies. And if we do not convert to Him—not in the sense in which we often interpret the word “conversion,” as if it were something moralistic—if Christ does not become the dearest thing to us, then renewal will be impossible, because man has a desire for fullness, and if he doesn't find it in a presence like Christ, then he looks elsewhere for it, we all look elsewhere for it. Thus, the gesture is not just a call in itself, but it also offers us the method and the path to respond to this call; it's not just a moralistic call, it shows us the way. Like in the first encounter that the Gospel recounts to us—the response and the path are in the first encounter, when the first two, John and Andrew, met Jesus, met a person, a presence so exceptional that the path was there, so much so that they returned the next day to look for Him, and became His for the rest of their lives. The question is whether or not the Church understands that this is the method; only if the Church becomes a presence, if every Christian becomes this type of presence, so that, by looking at him, one wants to return to see him the next day because he is decisive for living.

*So, in your opinion, what are the needs of the Church right now?*

The Church needs what Benedict XVI told us when he announced the Year of Faith; that is, the Church—like all of us in every moment of our lives—needs to rediscover what happened to us when we became Christians, to discover it again as something fascinating, new, truly attractive for life. If we reduce this to any one of the contemporary reductions of Christianity—organization, ethics, spiritualism—then it is not capable of taking hold of the totality of the “I,” and if it doesn't take hold of the totality of the “I,” then we look for satisfaction elsewhere. There is a phrase of St. Thomas Aquinas that I like a lot and that sums this up well: “Man's life consists in the affection that primarily sustains him, in which he finds his greatest satisfaction.” The question for each person—believer or not—in life is where he finds the greatest satisfaction. The problem is that all of the presences, the people that we meet, at first satisfy us, and then, many times, it deteriorates. The real question here is whether or not there is a presence in which the satisfaction not only does not deteriorate, but even grows in time, because otherwise life loses meaning. And then we identify with Eliot's famous phrase, “the life we have lost in living.” Unfortunately, this is the experience of many. Instead, the Christian experience offers us another possibility: to gain life in living. And you see that this is true in the Pope because, at his age, he is not losing; you see in his face that, at the height of his maturity, this man gains life in living.

*Fr. Julián, I'm going to ask you a question that you could call banal, but realistic. What sort of profile could the new Pope have?*

It seems to me that this is what we're saying: it's not that a particular profile is necessary; what is needed is a Christian, a believer, a person who can witness, as Benedict XVI did, and John Paul II

before him—to cite the last two—to the beauty of Christ. Because this is the problem today: that, in a confused world—we know the situation well, where we seem like ticking time bombs—people can find something to cling to that can truly answer. And this is not first of all an organization or a committee, it's a Christian, a new creation. It seems like this could go without saying, but it's simply what we would all desire to find at our side, to find in front of us: a person to whom we can look, someone who keeps us company in the fundamental aspects of living.

*You cited the English poet Eliot before. Your beloved predecessor, Fr. Giussani, was asked in one of his last televised interviews about Eliot's famous question, "Has the Church failed mankind, or has mankind failed the Church?" He answered, "Both," and said, "The Church was ashamed of Christ."*

Yes, in a certain way. The question is: why are we ashamed of Christ? Because, not having discovered Him with all of our humanity, we think that we are not offering to ourselves and to others the greatest thing that we could possibly offer. If one gives a gift to someone else, he does it happily, because he believes that he is doing a favor for the other person, he is giving that person the best that he has. But in order to be able to offer it like this—with this freedom, with this joy, with this gladness—then he must be convinced that it is something good for the other person, and thus he must have the conviction that it is something good for himself. So the question is always the same: what do we hold most dear? Because if what we hold most dear—as Soloviev said—is not Christ, then it's difficult not to be ashamed of proposing Him. And when one has this joy—it can be seen above all in the people who encounter it again, the latecomers, who are so overflowing with joy for what they met that they are not at all ashamed to say it, so convinced are they of offering to others what was for them the discovery of life, as it happened in the beginning and as it happens now in the people who rediscover it. The problem is this: that the Church, that each of us as Christians, can rediscover it.

*In one of his last speeches, while receiving the priests of the Diocese of Rome, Ratzinger concluded by saying, "the Lord will conquer." In what sense is this affirmation true?*

It is a metaphysical and existential certainty. The fact of the matter is that, according to a design that is not ours, He conquers in those who accept Him; to those who accept Him, He gives the authority, the power, the possibility to experience that they are children of God, that is, that they are so capable of being able to live that fullness that He gives, that He thus conquers. Because what is victory? Victory is not power or hegemony or an ability to control, dominate, or possess the other, but it's the ability to win over our "I" all the way down to its roots, to attract us so much that He can truly win us over. This is the victory of Christ. Without this, Christianity is not interesting, for us or for others.

*Fr. Julián, thank you for being with us and have a good day.*

Thank you.