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Carrón: The movements live a mission without limits

A reading of the document “Iuvenescit Ecclesia” by the president of Communion and Liberation

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“*Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, the Church rejuvenates...”: this joyful affirmation opens the Letter to the Bishops of the Church on the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church, dated Pentecost 2016 and signed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The entire tract (24 paragraphs divided into 5 chapters) is dedicated to renewing our awareness of the ways in which the charisms tirelessly inspired by the Holy Spirit within the living fabric of the Church rejuvenate her in a lasting way. Vatican II said it half a century ago, and the Holy See repeats it again today with words reinforced by history and experience. Over this long, but comparatively short post-Conciliar age, this history and experience has been shared by Communion and Liberation, a Movement with global dimensions, though it takes on the unmistakable face of the men and women in each individual place where Fr. Luigi Giussani’s spiritual children have gone to plant the seeds of the education- and mission-centered charism. Fr. Julián Carrón is one of these, called to the great responsibility of taking up the baton (the destiny of those who come after a founder) and carrying it far and wide as president of the Fraternity of CL, encouraged by the enthusiasm of a Pope who speaks the same native tongue.

Fr. Carrón, the Letter seeks to “encourage a fruitful and ordered participation of the new groups in the communion and the mission of the Church.” How do you understand the intent of this document, and its being proposed right now?

It’s a paternal gesture from the Church to shed light on the gifts the Spirit inspires from within to rejuvenate her, showing how they fit together with hierarchical gifts. Only from within an understanding of this relationship can charismatic gifts help to build the communion and mission of the Church.

One of the central points in the text is the relationship between charisms and the service of the Church. What has CL’s experience taught us about this?

Fr. Giussani always educated us, not only through his words, but even more through his actions, to place ourselves at the service of the Church in the way he took seriously every request that came from the Pope or the bishops, living obedience as the highest virtue in the imitation of Christ. And, secondly, he educated us to the service of the Church by constantly inviting us to be missionaries. He perceived the entire movement as part of the mission of the universal Church. From the beginning, he encouraged us to embrace the world in all its dimensions, like that openness without limit that we see in Pope Francis. Just think: the first young students in the Movement left for Brazil in January of 1962 to spread the news of that Christ who had changed their lives.

What purpose does the gift of a charism serve in an ecclesial movement? And what can we understand from the great variety of these groups?

They exist for the “apostolic goals of the Church.” St. Paul says, “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit,” as much for the person who receives it as for the entire Church. “Everything should be done for building up.” Their many faces speak of God’s indulgence for us; in His creativity, He gives His Church this variety of charisms to reach every person in a way that attractive and persuasive, according to his or her own history, culture or sensibility.

Let's compare these with a bricks and mortar entity, like a parish: how should a movement introduce its presence within the fabric of a community?

Parishes and movements are called to collaborate together, each playing its role, toward the single mission of the Church. Movements are able to reach men and women in the place where they work, play, study, etc. to bring them, then, to participate in the life of the Christian community which is brought together in the parish. As you see happening all over, those who belong to movements have long been collaborating in the catechesis, charitable initiatives, and liturgical service rooted in parish communities.

How has Communion and Liberation continued to discover itself along its journey within the Church, specifically in reference to its particular mission?

One of the most significant aspects of this Letter is that it is directed to “groups of the faithful, ecclesial movements and new communities,” all brought together by their common striving to “offer a proposal of the Christian life which is [...] global in outlook,” or “renewed forms of following Christ,” without a more specific focus. We find this description fits us well, in that the goal of our coming together is to bring “the attractiveness of the encounter with the Lord Jesus and the beauty of Christian existence lived in its integrity to new social contexts.” As Fr. Giussani wrote in his last letter to John Paul II: “I believe the genius of the Movement that I saw born was feeling the urgency to proclaim the necessity for a return to the basics of Christianity, in other words, a passion for the fact of Christianity such as it was in its original elements, and nothing more.”

How can we educate ourselves to understand what the Holy Spirit is asking of movements at this moment, which we could call the “time of maturity” of their presence and activity?

The Holy Father invites all of us to be a “Church which goes forth.” As Pope Francis told us all at the end of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Church is always turned to “faces, minds and hearts of real people... widening the horizons and taking up the new challenges that reality presents. [...] Look up and look ‘beyond,’ look at the many people who are ‘distant’ in our world.” Only by going out to meet the needs of our fellow men and women, through their real needs and circumstances, will we be able to recognize what the Holy Spirit is asking of us with the gift and grace of a charism.

What call do you perceive in the words and the witness of Pope Francis?

To learn to be in dialogue with the men and women of our time in a simple way, in a way that's accessible to everyone: through an encounter that can awaken the curiosity and desire of those we meet.

If you could speak to them personally, what would you say and what would you ask of those who are beginning their involvement in Communion and Liberation?

We propose the beauty and the attraction of the faith, of faith lived out in our present circumstances. I'd ask of them a simple openness to the witness of that attraction that we manage to communicate through our lives, touched and changed by the grace of an encounter.