

FOCOLARE

Faithful creativity

March 2018 was the tenth anniversary of the death of the founder of Focolare, Chiara Lubich. **Susanne Janssen** reports on a recent talk given by the Focolare Co-President Jesús Moran, about the importance of ‘contemporizing’ each gift of the Holy Spirit within the Church, including the Charism of Unity.

Charisms are spiritual gifts, new understandings of the faith, given by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church and the whole of humanity. They can survive for centuries, and according to Focolare Co-President and theologian Jesús Moran, the process of continually reworking them for changing times often starts immediately after the death of the founder.

Ten years after Chiara Lubich’s death, Moran has spoken on various occasions about the need to update the way the Focolare charism of unity is currently put into practice. He also spoke about the tension between being creative in making the charism relevant in current times, while at the same time being faithful to the original genuine inspiration of the founder.

These reflections are not only for communities belonging to Roman Catholic and other Christian Churches, but relevant and useful also for every group with a specific mission or goal.

‘The great challenge continually facing a charism is to be “creatively faithful”, or to be “faithfully creative”, because the two things go together,’ he says. ‘Only by being creative can you be faithful, and you are only faithful creatively.’

Since the beginning of Christianity

Moran explains this process as ‘contemporizing’ the charism, which he says is analogous to what happened with the Gospels. What we know about the life of Jesus; his words, his gestures and his actions have been written down in four versions – the four Gospels – plus Acts and the Epistles. There were other apocryphal texts that were

not chosen to be included in the Bible because they were regarded as being problematic.

However, even those texts that the Church defined to be part of the Scriptures are most likely not exactly the words that Jesus spoke. The events did not necessarily take place as recorded in the Bible.

Here too, says Moran, there was a transmitting process: ‘What happened is that the Holy Spirit guided a re-reading of what had been lived by those who were there in such a way that they expressed it in the way they did. That

is, all they lived, heard and touched – because John says this, referring to the Resurrection – “what we have seen and touched” (see 1 Jn 1: 1) – became contemporary in the mind of the Apostles through the action of the Holy Spirit, but also through their own intelligence and their own historical situation.’

This explains why we do not say ‘The Gospel of Jesus’ but ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to’ Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.

We have to take into consideration that each of the evangelists had a specific background and was writing for different audiences. For example, Moran explains, ‘Matthew is an individual person, a historical person living in a Jewish context with a Jewish mentality. Thus the Holy Spirit brought about this contemporizing effect on what he had seen, and led him to express himself as he did.’

Moran summarizes the causes of this adaptation process as follows: ‘a social issue, something urgent and challenging; human intelligence; the historical situation people are in; and, in the case of a charism, the Holy Spirit.’

Then there’s always the danger of confusing the gifts of God with our personal achievements, allowing pride

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or spiritual arrogance to enter in. So, in the process of adapting, there is often a crisis ‘when one realizes the huge distance between the gift of God and ourselves ... Without the dazzling light that comes from the founder, we discover who we are, and so we feel totally inadequate,’ he said.

But what we call ‘contemporizing’ is much more than making something contemporary. Updating is one part of contemporizing, but it is more a re-understanding of something that already exists, more like expressing things that were already there and had not yet come to light.

‘Obviously, the Apostles had not previously understood the things they wrote about Jesus, but they were in Jesus. In fact, John the Baptist said, “Another will come after me who will make all things clear” (see Mk 1: 6-8, Jn 14: 26). This is contemporizing!

‘Therefore contemporizing means better understanding something that is already understood – and this is one side of it, to understand something better than we did before – but also actually to express what has not been expressed, up until now.’

Contemporizing charisms today

Moran gives an example of how the Focolare should do this: ‘To contemporize the charism of unity today, of

course, we have to turn to Chiara Lubich’s writings. But it’s not enough to repeat them word for word, as they are; that’s not enough. The constant and never-ending challenge is for those texts to draw us into living the very experience they describe.’

This is a challenge that the older charisms – like the Franciscans, Dominicans or Jesuits, for example – have had to face for centuries. Franciscans still have to discover what being poor means today. Jesuits have to define their specific mission in today’s world, as do other religious orders and movements.

Moran remembers how, already during Chiara Lubich’s life, the founder reworked the charism herself, understanding more what it meant to live for unity.

When in the 1950s Chiara was asked: “Is this movement of unity also made for ecumenism?” Chiara replied, “No, we have nothing to do with ecumenism!” Later, in Germany and then in England, she met people from different Churches for the first time who were touched by the charism, and only then did she understand that unity was made for these people too, that her charism did have an ecumenical dimension.

‘So something that was already within the charism was adapted and came to light. This is contemporizing. She understood it was coherent with the charism as a whole.’



