

Traditional Rights and Founding Values

by Julián Carrón

Dear editor, after months of discussion regarding civil unions, Cirinnà's bill has reached the Parliament, prompting yet another public demonstration; two actually, one in favor and one against. Those supporting the initiative demand new rights be recognized, and those in opposition do so to defend traditional rights.

What causes the bitterness in this open conflict? One contingent of the public opinion claims these new rights are a step forward in civilization, while another considers them an attack to the founding values of Western civilization. Therefore, the social and political divides caused by these issues are seemingly irreconcilable. What's behind the strong attraction and aversion?

We have to ask ourselves the origin of these so-called "new rights." Each of these, when it comes down to it, draws from deeply human needs: the need to love and be loved, the desire to be a mother or a father, the fear of suffering and death and the search for one's identity. This is why they're so attractive and so numerous, each with the underlying secret hope that juridical structures can resolve the drama of living and "legally" guarantee the satisfaction of the infinite needs of every heart.

It is within this context that Cirinnà's proposal has been formed, intending to respond to the desire for emotional fulfillment between people of the same sex who want to be joined together, creating new social structures and demanding that they be recognized. With all due respect for the juridical debate, what I feel compelled to highlight here is that the issue at hand is still men and women and their fulfillment. Behind every human attempt is a cry for fulfillment. But is this initiative, sincere as it may be, a sufficient response?

Our contemporary culture, which we are all a part of, does not always look at the profound needs of the "I" in a way that grasps the infinite weight of those needs that constitute our humanity. Therefore, often it offers answers that are partial and therefore inadequate. But is human desire really compromised so easily? As Cesare Pavese taught us, "What man looks for in pleasure is an infinite, and no one would ever give up hope of reaching this infinite." A single drop can never fill the glass that is life. One example of this is the testimony—that I recently came across—of a homosexual man in the fashion industry who has a good job and a relationship with another man. He confided in a couple of friends he ran into by chance that he isn't happy and told them, "It's as if I'm missing something; it's like I'm living life as a reaction, defensively. That makes me uneasy."

Uneasy, like everyone else. We all tend to continually reduce our desire to an image we create, because we think the solution is just within reach. But real men and women never content themselves. The price they'd pay is too high; it would mean suffocating behind the bars of a prison they build themselves. Can our lack of satisfaction be healed with the passing of a law? Many people think so. This explains the furious fight to get it approved. On the other side, those who maintain that it threatens the basis of society often oppose it with the same fury, without even minimally challenging the position they're fighting, sometimes even supporting the challengers.

"Who will deliver us from this mortal situation?" St. Paul asked even in his time. Only a living encounter that exalts man's humanity and helps him breathe again can free him from the dictatorship of reducing his desires, awaking in him the desire for another type of life. Only such an encounter could be an adequate response to the reductions that even we see, while still respecting the freedom of the other. Like the friendship that the couple offered to their homosexual friend, which brought him to say, "It would be beautiful to live my work and my relationships as you and your wife live yours. You're special, in a normal way. It's beautiful speaking with you." And then he asked, "How do you live like this?"

The scene demonstrates what Fr. Giussani always reminded us, “In a society like this, you can’t create anything new except through a *life*: there are no structures, or organizations, or initiatives that can stand. Only a life that’s new and different can revolutionize structures, initiatives, relationships—in a word, everything.” That same life that challenged the thirst of the Samaritan woman, a thirst five husbands hadn’t satisfied.

Is this not perhaps what the world expects of us Christians? “What is missing is not so much the verbal or cultural repetition of a proclamation. Today’s men and women await, perhaps without realizing it, the experience of an encounter with people for whom the fact of Christ is such a real presence that their lives are changed. It is only a human impact that can shake up today’s man: an event that is an echo of the first event, when Jesus raised His eyes and said, ‘Zacchaeus, come down quickly; I am coming to your house’” (Fr. Giussani). This is where we find the method through which Christianity happened and continually happens again. In other words, Christ is not just a decoration and we look for a solution somewhere else, but rather the very key to the solution. Only Christ, an event present in people’s lives, is capable of freeing man from all his reductions and give him back the desire and experience of the fullness for which he is made. “It would be beautiful to live my work and my relationships as you and your wife live yours.” Without an experience of freedom like this, any supposedly “concrete” response will always be insufficient. Each of us finds direct proof in his or her life.

What, then, is the real contribution that each of us Christians is called to offer to the ongoing debate, not putting them into question, but faithful to the Church’s traditions and her teaching? “We know that the best response to conflicts of human beings, from the well-known *homo homini lupus* of Thomas Hobbes is the ‘*Ecce homo*’ of Jesus who does not recriminate, but welcomes and, paying in person, saves.” This certainty, testified to by Pope Francis, is the point of departure that makes it possible to relate to anyone, to “build together with others in civil society” (Florence, November 10, 2015), offering our contribution—to the degree it’s possible—to better the situation, keeping in mind to the good of all people.

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