
Synodal path. Msgr. Castillo (Peru): "The Church must not only perpetuate rituals, she must tackle the new challenges"

"In 1924 Pablo Neruda wrote 'Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair'. Today we are experiencing the opposite situation in the world. We hear many 'songs of despair', but there is also a poem of love: the Gospel that is asking to enter the world." Msgr. **Carlos Castillo**, Archbishop of Lima and Primate of Peru, continues his theological reflection - while fulfilling his Episcopal ministry - widely recognised in Italy especially after the publication, some twenty years ago, of a comprehensive essay featuring what he terms the "Theology of Regeneration." It is a key to accessing Gospel proclamation in the contemporary world, especially today, a time of war, pandemics and multiple crisis situations, which have had and continue to have a strong impact on the Latin American continent, owing to chronic inequalities and expanding drug trafficking. The interview is the fruit of a long conversation with Msgr. Castillo during one of his recent stays in Italy. This conversation identifies in the present synodal path, if taken seriously, an opportunity for the Church and the world today. It encapsulates some of the themes discussed in the presentation, which has been published recently, delivered last October at a seminar organised by the Academy for Life, the proceedings of which are now included in the volume [Etica e teologia della vita. Scrittura, tradizione, sfide pratiche](#) (*Ethics and Theology of Life. Scripture, Tradition, Practical Challenges*). In constant search of "radical" and non-obvious answers. **Monsignor Castillo, what is your interpretation of the present situation in the world?** As I understand it, we are dealing with the latest stage of a global crisis that plunges us into a time of major uncertainties. In 2001 we experienced the terrorism crisis, with the attack on the Twin Towers, followed by the economic and financial crisis in 2008, triggered by unbridled liberalism and financial development. The prevailing picture is one of a meaningless technological world, which is oblivious to the poverty of the world, the environmental crisis, and global warming. In this worldview, there is no chance for active human participation, and technology replaces wisdom. And then came the third global crisis, the pandemic crisis, which resulted in hopelessness and a further mechanisation of human relations. And at the very moment when - in the wake of the pandemic - there emerged a strong need for fraternity, for solidarity, for a change in our economic system, a divisive inclination intensified, and we stumbled into the ongoing war. It is in this context, which may seem pessimistic, that the message of the Gospel becomes relevant, provided we do not turn back, sweeping this scenario under the carpet to pretend it does not exist. That's why I say that this age, on the contrary, reminds me of Neruda's works: there is a love poem, the Gospel asking to be brought into the world that is in despair. **Given this scenario, how should the Church respond?** She must resume her role, avoiding the polarisations that are plaguing world societies today. The Church must also refrain from retreating into the past as a reaction to this world. Renowned historian Fernand Braudel famously explained that the path of history is laden with successive crises. And in fact all the crises that piled up over the past decades are emerging today. However, as Freud explains, what happens on a social level also occurs on a personal level, as a "historical trauma." But in my opinion, faith has a pre-natal origin, that the first experience is the free gift of love. Philosophers such as Sloterdijk, or theologians such as Sequeri, support my glimpse into this original experience. The human person will always remember these original elements of freely-given communion. Jesus is the One who re-generates from the cross, with infinite mercy, as the Pope reminds us. To some extent, our intense devotion to the Lord of the Miracles in Peru is also a response to this mystery. Now as always, the Church is called upon to embrace this likeness of Christ. Society was polarised even in Jesus' time, and Jesus shows us the way to step into history and experience situations which appear difficult and desperate. The Church must not leave people in desperate circumstances, she must highlight the roots of humanity, return to being a "womb-community", breaking out of the present "cage." **In concrete terms, what does this mean in terms of pastoral ministry?** In the passage of the boat in the storm, referred to by Pope

Francis on that memorable March 27, 2020, the apostles turn to Jesus and ask him, "don't you care if we drown?" In fact, they are not aware that Jesus is in the stern, that is, the front of the boat, possibly destined to sink. Jesus is in the most dangerous place and, in general, the place where the wounds are most profound. And that is where the Church must also be. We must return to the constituent elements of Jesus' life, to his death that is the pre-Nativity of the Resurrection. With these elements, in a subtle way, we must return to operate in human history. I believe this is the task of pastoral ministry, to proclaim the people of God, first of all the laity, starting from life, creating and rediscovering bonds. **Is the meaning of synodality to be found also here?** Of course, the key questions must be posed before the people gathered. Giving centrality to the community will usher in new ways of understanding the inherent nature of the Church. And this does not run counter to the long course of tradition, which throughout history has not been a path of preservation. The Church must not only perpetuate rituals, she must tackle the new challenges. The Church is not made once and for all, she is in a constant process of becoming. A Synodal Church gives prominence to the voice of the sick, of the poor, of the last, of popular movements, and also to those who are not normally involved, the elderly who tend to remain silent, for example. Pope Francis has often criticised clericalism. I believe that this phenomenon is connected with the "temptation on the pinnacle", one of the three temptations Jesus is confronted with in the wilderness. The temptation of feeling part of an "elite", to whom nothing will happen. The roots of this phenomenon go back to ancient times. Some recent studies have suggested that the same '*oligópistos*', i.e. the 'little faith' that Jesus ascribes to the apostles, would not actually represent, according to tradition, 'little faith', but rather 'the faith of the few'. Furthermore, in the Gospel, there is a misunderstanding between John the Baptist and Jesus. In fact, John the Baptist contemplates a baptism of repentance, for the purification of sins, Jesus takes the opposite path, that of the sinners, he becomes 'muddy' instead of purifying himself. The Church has only one option: to take that same path, not the path that makes her feel pure and separate from mankind. From the perspective of pastoral ministry, for example, this means adopting a diversified approach, considering the situation of each, and not in a generic manner. We must remember that the act of generating is the opposite of productivity. Today, being community means fertilising history with profound acts of love. There is also another aspect, a fundamental one. Synodality is a long, often tiring, process, but it must lead to a reform, if not, it risks plunging into a form of parliamentarism. The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* is very clear about this. It is not enough to listen, we must deliberate together. The time of "one decides for all" is over, the age we live in today is marked by unprecedented complexities and crises at global level! There is a risk that conclusions on major issues will be left to experts in the field, but these experts don't have a solution for everything, nor do priests and bishops. Even Jesus himself leaves it to his disciples. Our world will be saved by the wisdom of all, that is why the Pope says to listen to the people! **The Church in Latin America is likewise confronted with various challenges, but it seems to have resolutely taken the path of synodality. Is this the case, in your opinion?** The recent Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean provided an interesting example, and many proposals have been emerging in the process. The problem of bringing about a reform remains, this aspect has been missing until now. Furthermore, I see a widespread lack of in-depth formation. **Meanwhile, the Catholic Church faces "competition" from Evangelicals and Pentecostals...** On the one side there is the organic nature of the Church, while on the other we see a major personalisation of the faith, underpinned by the idea of individual salvation, a form of spiritualistic individualism, which gives rise to the so-called "prosperity" theology. The prospect is saving one's own soul, albeit with no regard for the suffering of the poor. Such a perspective "is an not engendering" one, history thus becomes "my story." Indeed, this underlying idea is anchored in strong community experiences, where, however, there is no reference to the broader community, to the dimension of those who are "excluded", that is, of him, her, them, over and above the totality of "us". Emmanuel Levinas argues that every totality is always challenged by the endless "other" to be found outside of "us". In fact, this is precisely the idea of synodality, starting from "him". The "Church

that goes forth" is not escapism, rather it means entering into reality, on another level, because it is perpetually open to our fellow other, in a constant process of expansion and renewal. **Latin American society is in the throes of drug trafficking, growing stronger by the day. What can the Church say and do?** There is either a proclamation of the Lord of life or a proclamation of death. The interests of Mafia syndicates extend into everyday life, an overwhelming presence that crushes the construction of the Gospel. For this reason, the Pope says that unlike the sinner, someone who is corrupt cannot become a saint, because that person justifies himself and leaves no room for anything else. Therefore, a Church that seeks a *modus vivendi* alongside the mafias, in reality, achieves a *modus morendi*. The Church must break out of this cage, with her own distinct and authentic proposal. Corruption must be overcome with the Gospel. (*) journalist at "La voce del popolo"

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