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A Voice Crying in the Wilderness... from Bologna

CARDINAL CARLO CAFFARRA

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Two years ago Caffarra submitted to Pope Francis his resignation from the pastoral government of the Archdiocese of Bologna because he had reached the age limit. The Pope replied through the good offices of the Apostolic Nunciature in Italy that “it is the Holy Father’s will that you continue your episcopal ministry in Bologna for another two years.” Now, after having led the diocese for twelve years, the Cardinal is about to leave Bologna. But what a fine person this seventy-something-year-old is, in his final days of governing the See of Saint Petronius. He challenges the contemporary mindset with prophecy. And in his heart he implores: “How long, O Lord?”

After the vote by the European Parliament that recommends the legal recognition of unions and marriages between persons of the same sex (and the subtext is: full speed ahead with the implementation of gender education), we went to visit him. “Gay unions and gender. If they were theories, the dialogue would be easier,” the Cardinal tells us. “Since theories are hypotheses that are not afraid to be subjected to the test of falsification. But instead they are ideologies. Therefore they yearn only to be imposed and are unwilling to dialogue with anyone at all.”

The Decline of a Civilization

“I had several thoughts about the motion voted on at the European Parliament. The first thought is this: we’ve reached the end. Europe is dying. And maybe it no longer even has a will to live. Because there has been no civilization that ever survived the attempt to dignify [*nobilitazione della*] homosexuality. I am not saying the practice of homosexuality. I am saying: the attempt to dignify homosexuality. Let me make an aside: someone might remark that no civilization has ever gone so far as to affirm same-sex marriage. And yet we need to remember that the attempt to dignify it is something more than marriage. In several nations homosexuality was a sacred act. In fact the adjective used in Leviticus to condemn the attempt to dignify homosexuality through sacred ritual is: ‘abominable.’ It was endowed with a sacral character in pagan temples and rituals.”

“This is so true that the only two civil institutions, if we may call them that, the only two peoples that resisted over the millennia—and right now I am thinking above all of the Jewish people—were those two peoples who alone condemned homosexuality: the Hebrew people and Christianity. Where are the Assyrians today? Where are the Babylonians today? And the Hebrew people was a tribe, it seemed to be nothing in comparison with other political and religious institutions. But the regulation of the practice

of one's sexuality, as we find for example in the Book of Leviticus, became a pre-eminent [*altissimo*] factor in civilization. This was my first thought: We've reached the end."

Satan Against the Obvious

"My second thought is clearly faith-related. When faced with events of this sort I always ask myself: how can it be that such basic, obvious facts should be obscured in a human mind; how is it possible? And the answer that I arrived at is as follows: all this is the devil's work. In the strict sense. It is the final gauntlet that Satan throws down to God the Creator, telling him: 'I'll show you: I am constructing an alternative creation to yours. You'll see: people will say, we are better off this way. You promise them freedom; I propose license instead. You give them love; I offer them emotions. You want justice; I want perfect equality that cancels out all difference.'"

"Allow me an aside. Why do I say 'alternative creation'? Because if we turn, as Jesus asks us, to the Beginning, to the original plan, to the way in which God designed creation, we see that this great edifice that is creation is erected on two columns: the man-woman relationship—the couple—and human work. We are talking now about the first column, but the second is being destroyed, too. We see, for example, how difficult it is nowadays to be able to talk about the primacy of work in economic systems. But I'll stop here because this is not the topic of our conversation. So, we are facing a diabolic attempt to erect an alternative creation, challenging God in the sense that man will end up thinking that he is better off in this alternative creation. Do you remember the Parable of the Grand Inquisitor [in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*]?"

"How Long, O Lord?"

"The third thought occurred to me in the form of a question: 'How long, O Lord?' And then the answer that the Lord gives in the Book of Revelation always resounds in my heart. The book relates that at the foot of the heavenly altar stand those who were slain for justice' sake: the martyrs, who continually say, 'how long, O Lord, before you avenge our blood?' (cf. Rev 6:9-10). And so it occurs to me to say: How long, O Lord, until you defend your creation? And again the answer from Revelation resounds within me: 'They were told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants should be complete.' What a great mystery God's patience is! I think about the wound in His Heart, which became visible, historic, when a soldier pierced the side of Christ. For about every creature and created thing the Bible says: 'and God saw that it was good.' Finally, at the climax of creation, after the creation of man and woman, we read: 'and God saw that it was all very good.' The joy of a great artist! Now this great work of art has been totally defaced. Yet he is patient and merciful. And he tells those who ask him, 'how long?' to wait. 'Until the number of the elect is fulfilled.'"

The Power of the Redeemer

"And here is my final thought. One day, when I was Archbishop of Ferrara, I found myself in one of the most remote villages, in the Po delta. A place that seemed to be at the end of the Earth, in the middle of one of those obstacle courses that the big river makes as it goes almost anywhere it wants before flowing into the sea. For the purpose of catechesis I met there a group of fishermen, people who literally spend most of their life at sea. One of them asked me this question: 'Think of the world as one of these cylindrical containers in which we put the fish we have just caught: so the world is this sort of barrel and we are like the fish that have just been caught. My question is: how do we refer to the bottom of this barrel, what is its name?' Imagine: a fisherman who asks the question that is at the beginning of all philosophy: what do we call the bottom of all things? And then I, quite struck by this question, answered him: 'The bottom is not called chance; it is called gratuitousness, the undeserved

goodness and tenderness of someone who holds us all in his embrace.’ In recent days I thought again about the question and the answer that I gave to that old fisherman, because I wonder: does this whole attempt to deface and destroy creation have so much strength that it will win in the end? No. I think that there is a more powerful force, which is the redemptive act of Christ, *Redemptor Hominis Christus*, Christ the Redeemer of mankind.”

The Task of Pastors and of Spouses

“Here is another reflection, prompted precisely by my thoughts in recent days. But what about me as a pastor: what shall I do to help my folks, my people, to keep the original vision in mind and in their moral awareness? What can I do to prevent their hearts from being darkened? I think about the young people, those who still have the courage to get married, and about their children. And then I think about what is normally done in the world when it is necessary to deal with a pandemic. There are public organizations responsible for the health of the citizenry: what do they do? They always act according to two guidelines. The first: for now, they treat those who are sick and try to save them. The second is no less important, indeed decisive: they seek to understand what the causes of the pandemic are, so as to develop a winning strategy. So now the pandemic is here. And as a pastor I have the responsibility for healing and for preventing people from getting sick. But at the same time I have the serious duty to start a process, that is, a program of intervention that will demand patience, commitment and time. And the battle will get more and more difficult. This is so true that I sometimes tell my priests: I am sure that I will die in my bed. I am less sure about my successor. He will probably die in the *Dozza* [the prison in Bologna – *Editor’s note*]. Therefore we are talking about a long process that will involve us in a difficult battle. But after all, we are called to do both things: prompt intervention and long-term battle, an emergency strategy and a long process of education.”

“This is what the pastors of the Church are for. They have received a consecration designed for this purpose; Christ’s power is in them. ‘For two thousand years now in Europe the bishop has been one of the vital nerve centers, not only of eternal life, but of civilization’ (Giuseppe De Luca). And a civilization is also the humble, magnificent everyday life of the people born of the Gospel that the bishop preaches. And then [this is what] the spouses [are for]. Because rational discourse comes after the perception of something beautiful, of a good that you see before your eyes, Christian marriage.”

Q. And what about the emergency intervention?

“I must admit that I myself have difficulty here. This is because not infrequently I happen to lack the ally that is the human heart. I am thinking of the situation among the youth. They come and ask me: ‘Why do we have to commit ourselves definitively, when we are not even sure that we will manage to love each other until evening?’ Now, when faced with this question I have only one answer: Recollect yourself and think of what you experienced when you told a girl or a guy, ‘I love you, I really love you.’ Did you perhaps think in your heart: ‘I will give myself totally to another person, but only for a quarter of an hour or at most until evening?’ This is not part of the experience of a love, which is a gift. It is more like a loan, which is a calculation.”

“Now if you succeed also in guiding the person to this interior listening (Augustine), you have saved him. Because the heart does not deceive. This is the great dogmatic thesis of the Catholic Church: sin did not radically corrupt man. The Church has always taught this. Man has caused enormous disasters, but the image of God has remained. I see today that young people are less and less capable of this return into themselves. Augustine experienced the same drama when he was their age. What, basically, prompted Augustine at last? The sight of a bishop, Ambrose; the sight of a community that sang with its heart more than with its lips the beauty of creation, *Deus creator omnium*, the very beautiful hymn by

Ambrose.”

“Today this is very difficult with young people, but in my opinion this is the emergency intervention. There is no other. If we lose this ally, which is the human heart—the human heart is the ally of the Gospel, because the human heart was created in Christ and in accordance with Christ—if we lose this ally, I say, I see no other path.”

“I would like to say one final thing. The further along I have come in life, the more I have discovered the importance of civil laws in man’s life, in order to have a good life. I have understood what Heraclitus says: “The people need to fight for the law as though for the city walls.” The older I get, the more I have realized the importance of the law in the life of a people. Today it seems that the State has abdicated its legislative duty, that it has abdicated its dignity, reducing itself to being a tape recorder of the desires of individuals. The result is that we are creating a society of conflicting egotisms, or else of fragile agreements of contrary interests. Tacitus says: *Corruptissima re publica, plurimae leges*. There are many, many laws when the State is corrupt. When the State is corrupt, laws multiply. This is the situation today.”

“It is a vicious circle, because on the one hand the laws seem to be reduced to a tape recorder of desires. This inevitably results in social issues marked by conflict, struggle, the supremacy of the more powerful over the weaker, in other words, the corruption of the very idea of the common good, of the *res publica*. Then they try to remedy this with laws, forgetting that there will never be laws so perfect as to make the practice of the virtues unnecessary. That will never happen. Here, in my opinion, we pastors have much to answer for, that we have allowed the Catholics in society to become culturally irrelevant. We have allowed it, if not justified it. When has the Church ever done that? When have the great pastors of the Church ever done that?”

One final question: your thoughts about the event in Rome on June 20, when Catholics and non-Catholics will demonstrate in favor of preserving intact at the legislative level the principle that marriage is between one man and one woman and that the right of every child to have a father and a mother, to be educated and not manipulated by gender ideology, should be safeguarded by every desire of adults and by all State instruction.

“I have no doubt in saying that this is a positive demonstration because, I as said, we cannot remain silent. Woe to us if the Lord were to rebuke us in the words of the prophet: dogs that did not bark. We know that in democratic systems political deliberation is conducted according to the principle of majority rule. And I like that, because it is better to count witnesses than to cut them down. However, in view of these developments there is no majority that could silence me. Otherwise I would be a dog that did not bark. Above all I am impressed by the fact that this day was organized around the defense of children, and I appreciated this very much. Pope Francis said that a child cannot be treated like a guinea pig. Pseudo-pedagogical experiments are being performed on children. But what right do we have to do that? The most dreadful thing, the most severe saying ever spoken by Jesus, concerns the defense of children.”

“Therefore in my opinion the Roman initiative [demonstration] is something that absolutely had to be done. The next day, probably, Parliament will pass this law recognizing same-sex unions. It is drafting it now. But let it know that this is profoundly unjust. And we must tell them so on that afternoon in Rome. When the Lord says to the prophet Ezekiel, ‘You must rebuke them,’ it seems that the prophet says, ‘Yes, but they do not listen to me.’ Just rebuke them, and those whom you rebuke will be responsible, not you, because you rebuked them. But if you do not rebuke them, you will be responsible. If we remain silent about such a thing, we will share in the responsibility for this serious

injustice toward children, who are subjects of rights like any other human person but are being turned into objects of the desires of adult persons. We have gone back to paganism, in which the child had no right. He was merely an object “at someone else’s disposal.” Therefore, I repeat, in my opinion this is an initiative worth supporting; we cannot remain silent.”

Translated by Michael J. Miller

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