

Generated by Life to Correspond to Love

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To generate means to speak of life, but today this is cannot be taken for granted. In fact, in our time there is a serious risk of sterility, not only due to the demographic Winter that is spreading very fast, but above all due to the inability to exit spontaneously from one's own stagnation to go to meet the other person. There is a whole system of withdrawal for fear of being contaminated by anything that represents a threat or danger to oneself. Today, as never before, we are in a real anthropological crisis, which began and has continued in the last centuries with the illusion that we can live our humanity in a different way. Post-modern man, who has distanced himself from God, wishes to affirm himself above everything in a sort of delirious omnipotence. The idea of the "*self-made man*", of man who affirms himself and who is the Alpha and Omega/beginning and end of himself, who is the master of his life and of the world, predominates. Thus, paradoxically man who sought to be free and the father of his life, discovered that he is an orphan without brothers. The result of this is before everyone's eyes and no context is exempt from the feeling of dissatisfaction which can burn existence and turn into discontent.

I.

Not one of us is the *Creator* of his own being. No one is able to create life. We come from *Someone*. We are brought into the world. There is a womb that has conceived us in love and we are all part of this process of on-going procreation which continually brings us to light in the world and gives birth to a fuller humanity day after day.

Today's culture has transformed bonds into chains from which one seeks to struggle free in the name of the right to self-determination, which sees the link as an obstacle, rather than as an opportunity. Self-sufficiency is an illusion and this deceit has enslaved us more than before, anesthetized and made us indifferent to others. On the contrary, by binding oneself to something and in relation to someone one is free, not by severing the bonds. It is a debt of gratitude that makes us responsible, and, therefore, anxious to repay, rather than to claim rights. What do we have that has not been given to us? We must return what we have been offered as a gift in the first place. We become able to give if we are able to receive. This is a sign of gratitude spontaneously given.

To enter this procreative dynamic helps one to grow in the awareness of having been brought to life by a gift of love in order to be able to procreate in one's turn. Procreated and made fertile. We are called to live human life as the manifestation of the divine element within the mystery of the Incarnation that is the assumption of our own humanity. To be authentically Christian, our existence is called to be a continuation of the incarnation of the Verb. In making oneself the flesh of God one is reminded of the logic of the One — who assumed our human flesh. Benedict XVI described God as "*a companion of humanity, who offers paths of meaning and light, a God of joy, of fullness, who is often to be found in the depths of humanity*". God has fully revealed himself; he is open to encounter and accessible to mankind in Jesus. So let us stake our credibility on the capacity to render man fully human, opening him/her to that God who has revealed himself and made himself open to encounter in the humanity of Jesus.¹ This attitude expresses the mature faith of an adult. But this generation denies the structural identity of adulthood which is that of self-effacement in view of healing others. Today mothers want to appear to be like their daughters and behave like them. The same goes for fathers, who give up their dignity to emulate their sons' teenage culture. One goes in search of eternal youth without realizing that the consequence is true and proper educative paralysis. The young people do not have before them the example of adults with whom to enter into a healthy relationship of educative debate. "*Today, what is required of a father, experiencing the discomfort of youth, is not a request for power and discipline, but testimony*" (cf. M. Recalcati). The young people lack good examples to show them how to be and become adult, that is, able to mature, assume responsibility

for the good of others, be confident in facing reality despite the inevitable contradictions and effort. Where there is no adult culture, neither is there vocational culture. When adults do not live up to their mature development their capacity for vocational generation is also lacking.

This is why, to assume humanity as a vocation and a task to be achieved becomes ever more pressing and necessary in order to succeed not only in becoming increasingly aware of having been generated, but above all of learning to respond to this Love that continually renews our existence and makes us able to pass it on in our turn. All this transpires on the journey. Movement, the journey, is the locus of the experience of faith. The truth is not found in any one place because truth is on the move.

2.

No stage marks the point of arrival. Rather, there is always a new point of departure. “Give priority to actions which generate new processes”... do not “give priority to space” (EG, n. 223), Pope Francis recalls. This is why we must help young people to enter a regenerative dynamic that will help them to:—

- re-discover the aspirations of the heart/“desire”
- “bring into the world”
- “care for and let go”
- reciprocate — restore ²

Re-discover the aspirations of the heart

Aspiration: means to make room for the longing for the Infinite that dwells in our heart. It is our duty to cultivate this spark within us, to counter the enslavement linked to satisfying never-ending needs. To aspire is not to satisfy needs or to seek pleasure, but concerns the stars, the Highest that frees us from the prison of contingencies and from the natural reaction to the stimuli that surround us. From *de sidus: absence of a star, of a point of reference; it is nostalgia for a fullness that we have somehow experienced.*

Today aspiration has been confused with need. We are bombarded by a whole series of stimuli that create needs — to which we succumb, that enslave us, — in an attempt to make us feel satiated, satisfied, but which always entail further hunger and emptiness. On the contrary, to aspire to something opens and refers us to what is greater, something of which we can only glimpse a part, to something that exerts a strong attraction to the fullness of life.

What questions dwell in the hearts of our young people? What are they really looking for? Jesus asked his disciples: “What do you seek?” (Jn: 1:38). Jesus asked Mary Magdalen: “Whom do you seek?” (Jn 20:15). She was weeping: “Because they have taken away my *Lord*, and I do not know where they have laid him” (Jn 20:13).

In fact, the first thing that Jesus asked of his first disciples was not obedience or adhesion, obedience to rules or prayer formulae. What he asked them for was a journey towards the heart, to enter their own centre to meet the aspiration that dwells in the depths of life, because aspiration is the place where one’s own truth meets the truth of God. God is encountered within one’s own aspiration that he himself kindled within each of us. Augustine, expressed it poetically as no other: “*You made us for you, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you!*”. ³ The longing for God is made up of the genuine hunger and thirst of the human being. Jesus expresses it well: “*man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Mt 4:4; Dt 8:3).

Jesus, Lord of Aspiration, lets us understand that we lack something, something vital: what do our young people lack? Do they lack orientation, joy, the zest for life, love, the meaning of life...? And in order to fill

this gap every prodigal son begins the homeward journey. Need becomes the vital energy that motivates and sets them in motion. Aspiration, like need, springs from the lack of something. Need arises punctually and is physiological and dies once it has been satisfied: aspiration instead is structurally open, it is not exhausted once it has been satisfied; it introduces us to a broader horizon that sets us going. The yearning for fullness too derives from actually experiencing “emptiness”. Without this empty feeling there is no life, rather like the uterus’ vital empty space, that makes life possible.

3.

To educate: is to help people to inhabit, to remain within one’s own emptiness, that one fears and from which one wishes to escape, until blessed and filled to overflowing by God.

Birth

Yearning, that feeling that leads us to wait, to seek, to hope, is fertilized at a certain moment by the mystery of encounter. Birth always happens in a dynamic of decentralisation: I let myself be fertilized by life in order to be a means of passing it on beyond myself. I do not create life, but I can allow its passage. To give birth without any claim to be at its absolute origin means to receive and restore. It means to become a vehicle, an instrument, for an end. To receive, transform, restore something that enters the world going out beyond oneself and allowing something to receive new life. ⁴

Two actions are involved in giving birth: conception and delivery — that presuppose the ability to decentralize/let go and to welcome.

To conceive etymologically derives from *cum capere* which means to draw to oneself, welcome, contain. To conceive is to make room for another, to what is not my “I”.

This is not a one way direction: I consent to come into the world and the other agrees to recognise me in a new light, to become what I could not know that I was. I procreate someone or create something which in turn, generates me as a person and in this reciprocal condition each one gives the other a fragment of his/her truth. Riciprocity is not just openness to the other, but rather the capacity to obtain from the other our own truth. I receive from the other a part of my being, my self that I could not have extracted on my own. Without the other person, who I let be independant, I would not even know who I was. Every deep relationship is generative, because it makes of us what we would never have been otherwise.

The generative logic of history is not a straight line projected to the future, but a spiral which holds together the cyclical repetition and the procreative novelty. This is typically female. The time a woman lives is not repetitive and fixed, linear, but cyclical it has a beginning, development and plenitude: a spiral whose motion steadily accelerates. The body of the woman has its cycle, a cycle in which it may be fertilized and it is marked by blood/her period. She can bear in her womb “another being” giving it life. A vulnerable foetus is subject to the will of the other, to the suffering of the other, to the emotions of the other (often one no longer knows how to control own’s emotions and even less how to react to those of others... we are emotionally illiterate).

Body: stands for fragility. Fragility designates the very name of humanity, is its distinctive mark, its nature. Fragility is both dramatic and moving at one and the same time, a sign of weakness and the symbol of man as a creature. It is poverty and wealth. It is consternation and beauty. It is an adversary with whom one must come to terms and this is not always easy even for our young people. Fragile — is everything that can break, fragment, it recalls our limitations, the brevity of time that passes. Yet, as Antonietta Potente has written: “*Necessity and limitations make us friends, make us mendicants that is, able to feel the need of*

the company of others, of the knowledge of others; only someone who is aware of this can be a community person".⁵

Let us try to transform and transfigure the limitation so that it may become space for the power of God when we understand that strength of mind presupposes fragility. Strong is the one who knows that he/she is weak, who recognises and assumes his/her own real limitations. Only what is assimilated produces life (Fathers of the Church).

To give birth is an extraordinary experience, although painful and demanding, because there is an insuppressible link between love and pain. Without the pangs of labour/childbirth the incarnation does not take place: *"in pain you shall bring forth children"* (Gen 3:16). Every thing that comes to life passes through a narrow passage and travail. Joy renders fecund, pain gives birth.

To give birth in pain, to make life win even at the price of pain, means to recognise and accept suffering as a structural dimension of relationship, of fraternal life, apostolic life, because it defeats egoism as freedom shows, opening it to free giving.

Every true encounter modifies those who experience it, and this transformation has its cost too. As long as the choice of "you" does not involve one's own availability, self-denial or suffering for your good, that person does not really belong to me. However, to achieve great things we are capable of great suffering and ardour.

Even in a relationship, even the most beautiful relationship, we must allow suffering to play a role. Lewis wrote: *"For whatever is dear to you, your heart will have to suffer sooner or later, even to the point of breaking"*. What makes me suffer in a relationship shows me what I am seeking in that relationship; what causes me to suffer in a situation shows me what I am seeking, what I expect from that situation.

The consequence of escaping from suffering is always a weakening of the bond. The women at the Crucifixion, at the foot of the Cross, are the sign of a love that defies death, has the strength to stay, to persevere in a painful situation, only in the name of love and compassion, only because one has bound one's life to that of another.

To Care

It is not enough to bring a being into the world even in painful labour, one must take care to help it grow up, stay alive in the world, sustain it in its frailty. The Latin root of *"cura"* contains an entire phrase, an action that qualifies it: *cor urat* — warm the heart. To warm, one must touch, stay close, embrace; it denies distance, it means closeness; however it also has a different meaning from *kau* observe (from which wisdom derives). It is linked to eye contact, but also to wisdom: knowing not only with the mind, but with one's whole person. Care warms and transforms the gaze. In fact, before being action it is a form of gaze, a mode of relating, it is the font of energy and novelty. Today care can change our gaze. This is more necessary than ever. Our way of looking at the world needs to be healed in order to see without violence, without possessing. It is the deepest meaning of chastity.

5.

Care is a form of interaction. It is not a shackle, a chain (even though alterity delimits the "I". Today we are allergic to whatever binds: relationship = *re – ligo*), but it is a relationship that is constantly entrusted to the world, made to be and to endure. It is an interesting fact that energy expended on care returns multiplied by the effect of reciprocity, by the novelty that the bond always gives. To cultivate is not to oversee,

control... it requires patience, *pathos*, *dedication*, *emotional involvement*, *tenderness*. Tenderness is a human and humanising quality. A hard person is on the self-defence. Obviously to be hard is the opposite of being tender. Hardness leads to withdrawal, to self-defence, to no contact. In this way one thinks one can avoid being hurt, but then one meets no one.

The wound that makes us vulnerable is a rent in our surface, our skin. A wound that empties us, that maims us painfully and may prove fatal; but it might also be an “arrow slit”, a cut that pierces the armour of the “I”. Thus the breast-plate opens to the exterior and to alterity, it lets in new light, which otherwise could not have found a passage, allows one to glimpse beyond, to see what would otherwise have remained sealed.

Correspond — Exchange

To let go is a difficult, painful step to take. Yet it is an extraordinary one because through it life, its flow, brings a surprise. It is to stand aside to let the other live instead of suffocating it by over-protection. If we love the one or what we bring to life we cannot but wish the plenitude of the other and self-withdrawal is the condition. One’s offspring may not be as one dreamed, but it is nevertheless one’s child: given not chosen. One chooses one’s friends; brothers, sisters are embraced. In order that a child be born, the mother must let it go: — at birth, when it learns to walk, when it chooses its path, when this path does not go far and even when it leads to perdition.

The law of love is always Paschal. One must accept detachment, absence, departure; at delivery even when one’s physical heart feels it ripping from it.

The relationship with the other that giving birth implies inevitably makes us vulnerable. No one is spared some inevitable evolutive difficulties and relations linked to the mystery of time and of alterity. Development has its troubles, brings crises, and each stage needs to be met intelligently in order to bring to maturity all that is authentically human in us. Crisis is a part of life, and an integral part, because it marks the moments of passage, of crucial change, in which the individual is obliged to face unexpected situations and take relevant decisions which are not easy. In every situation of crisis one loses something linked to the previous state of balance and this loss is irrevocable. The protagonist realises what has been lost before becoming aware of what has been gained. In these situations we must be ready to “*lose oneself in order to find oneself*”: it is a process of death and rebirth, painful, but endowed with unexpected possibilities, that lead us to discover unsuspected capacities and energy within us; what at first appeared to be a dreadful tunnel with no exit turns out to be an extraordinary opportunity for development. Crisis alone can enable us to achieve new balance after crossing a fraught period of uncertainty. We must recognize the evolutive, transformative power of crisis.

6.

One form of detachment, of dying for life, is *disenchantment*, as Bonhoeffer called it. Disenchantment is to experience and tolerate, without rancour or resignation, when even the most beautiful, strong, free attachment shows cracks: moments of tension, conflict, distance, a feeling of not being understood as one would like (in interpersonal, community relations, with superiors, with the priests with whom one works...). It is precisely by accepting disenchantment that we learn to go through the narrow door of true love, of charity, and let the other person be free to be him/herself; though wishing the best for them — we accept their shortcomings, as we learn to recognise and accept them as they are and not as we would wish them to be.

It is the Eucharistic logic of gift, of sacrifice, of resurrection/communion. It is the recurrent, dynamic cycle in which love, given and received, predominates; we feel we are in love, attracted, gratified, understood,... the moment in which we feel able to achieve great things for God, for the whole world.... Then, comes the phase with its limitations, disillusionment, love fades: one feels dissatisfied, sad, lonely, disillusioned; solitary, in which obedience becomes difficult and the temptation to give up arises. The phase in which relationship returns and once again becomes full, authentic communion while the trials, crises, wounds, one's own sins appear in the gracious hands of the Saviour as heart-rending reproaches. The rejection of this mystery always brings with it closure and flight from situations and relations and leads to aridity, and sterility. When we nourish ourselves of the Eucharist, we foster within us the potential to render fertile life's negative moments which we experience every time we feel hurt and reappraised in our expectations that are very often unreasonable.

It is a journey that should be accompanied as we go from falling in love, to love through research, struggle, attending to the relationship with the Lord.

Through disenchantment in order to rise above it: from what I expected you to be, to what you are; from how I would have liked you to be, to what you could do.... I take you into my house thus; I learn to love you as you are: good and bad. This applies: in our fraternal relations, before the community as a body, it stands first and foremost for each one in relation to him/herself.

The new-born are not ready formed people, perfect: they have experienced contradiction, failure, setbacks, inconsistency. Their openness in going to meet life exposes them to delusions, wounds, betrayal. They are not experts, but fundamentally witnesses. The witness passes on what he/she has received, known, assimilated and delivers it to others.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cf. Cozza, R. *La custodia dell'umano. Nuovi orizzonti per la vita religiosa*, EDB, Bologna, 2014.
2. Pope Francis to Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for Culture, 7 February 2015, on "Feminine Cultures: equality and difference". The first theme was – "criteria and new methods in order that women may not feel like guests, but full participants in the various spheres of society and Church life". The second theme was: "'generativity' as a symbolic code". The "willingness to give time rather than to occupy space, to welcome rather than to exclude".
3. Cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, 1. 1-2. 2; 5. 5; CSEL 33, 1-5.
4. Cf. Magatti, M. – C. Giaccardi, *Generativi di tutto il mondo, unitevi! Manifesto per la società dei liberi*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2014.
5. Cf. Potente, A. *La religiosità della vita. Una proposta alternativa per abitare la storia*, Icone Edizioni, Roma, 2004.