

In Dialogue with “New Horizons” founder Chiara Amirante

# Offering the Gospel in all its freshness

**Hubertus Blaumeiser**

*Thirty years ago, at Termini Station in Rome, a young Chiara Amirante let herself be touched by the cries of young people ravaged by the hell of addiction, crime and despair. There, she began spending time listening and drawing closer to them to respond concretely to their suffering. Little by little, others were drawn into this adventure with her, and the "New Horizons" Association was born. Today it has spread to many countries. "From the people of the night", Amirante recounted at the February 2022 Vatican Symposium on the Priesthood, "a new people of the resurrection were born". We spoke with Chiara about the capacity of Christian communities to create something new.*

The charism [of New Horizons] desires to bring the light of God's love to those in darkness and despair, by descending into that underworld where countless young people remain with their soul seemingly extinguished, to bear witness to the fullness of joy of the Risen Christ, the only joy capable of liberating someone from the hellish prisons of today's world. This is Chiara Amirante's charism that inspires the community's spirituality and its initiatives.

On December 8, 2010, the Pontifical Council for the Laity signed the decree approving New Horizons' ("Nuovi Orizzonti") statutes as a private association of the faithful. 'New Horizons' continues to develop and is spreading rapidly. We asked Chiara Amirante about what pastoral care looks like from the perspective of this charismatic experience.

## **Crucial aspects of Christian communities**

*We see many Christian communities reducing in size and vitality. There is an exodus of young people, few vocations and a minimal impact on the surrounding environment. What do you see as the reason for this decline in church life?*

As I said at the Symposium, "Priesthood today is identified with the ministerial priesthood, while its baptismal form struggles to find its place in our Christian communities. It is not

uncommon for the exercise of our baptismal priesthood to be reduced to a clericalization of the laity through demeaning their role and a distortion of their essence."

As Pope Francis often says, it is precisely here that toxic consequences arise within many Christian communities. We see this crisis before our eyes. Communities are no longer capable of proclaiming and generating an experience of encounter with the Risen Christ. They are often held back by repetitive forms of worship and ritual that are now incomprehensible to people. Dissatisfied and saddened believers manifest their obvious human frailties through frustration, petty power struggles and forms of envy and jealousy. This stunts even small shoots of newness. Well-prepared women and men who sincerely desire to participate in community life are sidelined or turn away in disappointment or bitterness. There is a kind of progressive cultural and pastoral impoverishment that is satisfied with "it has always been done this way" and "this is what people like." Moreover, some "parish" language is now so obsolete that it no longer speaks to people today. So, there is all this, without even talking about the obvious crisis of credibility due to scandals and mismanagement that have affected many church communities. Thus, a new Christian identity beginning precisely from Baptism is urgently needed.

### **God's Love Brings Unimaginable Joy**

*"New Horizons" has developed extensively in recent years. What is the "secret" of this growth?*

It is an ongoing adventure of welcoming *people of the night* by offering the divine freshness of the Gospel to everyone. It is also the willingness to radically put it into practice after meditating every morning together and then to discover the unceasing prayer of the heart which is like a breath of the soul and a "heartbeat to heartbeat" with the Master. It is the concreteness of mutual love that consists in listening, helping one another and in the search for truth and mercy. These are all the ideals that have guided us in these years, ideals that produce this lively, resplendent joy that so many experience when they come to our communities.

We discover daily that only God's infinite Love can take upon Himself all our suffering and pain, making our every cry His own. This love conveys itself through the love of brothers and sisters, in concrete gestures that generate that joy within us. This fills our days and our lives. This joy, this inner freedom, generates in many who meet us a deep longing, one for which they want to remain in contact and become a part of this same journey.

### **A world in need of Christ's joy and peace**

*In the light of your own experience, where do you think parish and consecrated community life should focus in order to foster a greater capacity to bring about new life?*

*Evangelization:* it is the calling we received and the urgency of our times. Woe to us if we do not bear witness! Others can pass from death to life through the ways in which we evangelize. There is an urgent need to reach out to young people where they are at, conscious that they need witnesses now more than ever. They need people who can give heartfelt, joyful and enthusiastic witness to the wonders the Lord has done. Our world is dying for lack of love. It is imperative that we direct our efforts to powerfully proclaiming the Truth, the good news of the Gospel. To those who have never known love, we need to bring the merciful, tender embrace of the One who so madly loved us.

Today's world does not need to be told that Christ is joy. It needs to see it in your eyes, in everything you do. The overflowing *joy of the Risen Christ*. Our world does not need proclaiming that Christ is peace. Rather, it needs to see that enduring peace in your heart, even in the most terrible of trials. Others need to see this Love in your gaze, your embrace and in your tenderness. Joy urgently needs to flourish in our Christian communities as a constitutive characteristic of the Christian vocation!

We can combat false prophets who go to great lengths to propagate their lies by using the powerful means of communication and new technological tools available to us in order to reach as many people as possible.

It is equally urgent to enact a new, integral formation of lay Christians that renders them capable of a deeper listening to the silent cry of so many newly impoverished and victims of the evil one. There is need to respond with charity, to take upon oneself the sufferings of those in difficulty and accompany them.

But above all, we must focus on those who are hopelessly in love with God, inflamed by the Fire of the Holy Spirit, rooted in the Gospel, and able to rekindle that longing for Heaven which is present in the heart of every person. There is need for credible pastors and Christians, people deeply and radically renewed by their encounter with the risen Christ and by a life lived in ever deeper intimacy with the One who is Love. Such people know how to guide others to rediscover the beauty of the Christian life. If we do not aim for holiness, we are outside God's calling!

### **Healing of the Heart**

*In your work with so many who have been wounded by life events, you recently developed an innovative path for healing the heart. You speak of it in your recent book, Inner Peace, which is the first in an upcoming series dedicated to Spiritherapy. Can you say a bit more about this and what it could mean for evangelization?*

The decision to call this pathway of the art of loving, *Spiritherapy*, comes from an intuition. The spirit is what characterizes us, whether we call it "image and likeness of God", "divine spark," or "our capacity for love." It is the spirit, with its immense potential in us, that needs to be discovered and developed.

This is why *Spiritherapy* is proposed in our communities and open to all. It is a path of self-knowledge in the art of loving and in the healing of the heart. It involves identifying wounds that make it impossible for a person to move from "wanting to love" to "being able to love." If it is true that we are created in the image and likeness of God who is Love, then it is also true that love -- loving and being loved -- is the fundamental need of our existence. We all seek love, joy, happiness and complete fulfillment. The problem is that we are going down the wrong paths today. We have forgotten the secret that Jesus gave us. It is not just one of "love," but rather one of "Abide in my love.... Love one another as I have loved you."

If there are so few of us Christians who experience the fullness of joy -- and society is so characterized today by depression, sadness, loneliness -- the likely reason is that we do not love as He taught us. Love is learned. It has to be translated into concrete actions, freed from those obstacles that block or hinder its course. This is why we need a deep healing of the heart. This healing comes when we recognize our frailties, our dysfunctional behaviors that lead us to perpetuate vicious circles that feed our unhappiness. It frees us from these traps

and wounds to adopt healthy, new attitudes and behaviors. It marks the beginning of a change that generates well-being in us and around us.

It is a discovering that by strengthening the spiritual part of oneself, then the spirit -- one's own divine power -- sustains and heals what is unhinged within us, whether we have the gift of faith or not. This strengthening of the spirit that brings one's heart to beat again was an immense discovery for me. I saw this miracle not only in my own life but in the lives of those who came to me and who had lived through hell.

All this becomes a marvelous opportunity for personal and ecclesial formation through overcoming barriers tied to personal immaturity and the entrenched, paralyzing conflicts lurking within relationships. The proclamation of the Gospel, sacramental life, and charitable service are all transformed in irrepressible vitality and joy. Everything becomes clothed with a new light, with new energy and vitality. The words: "See how they love one another" become the leitmotif of those who approach us out of curiosity. Our way of life awakens those early longings for Heaven still nestled in the heart of every person.