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Translated final interview with Martini

John L. Allen Jr. | Sep. 4, 2012 NCR Today

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini died in Varese, northern Italy, on Aug. 31 at the age of 85. Two weeks earlier, on Aug. 8, Martini gave a final interview to his fellow Jesuit Fr. George Sporschill, with whom Martini had collaborated on a book titled Nocturnal Conversations in Jerusalem, *and an Italian friend named Federica Radice Fossati Confalonieri. Radice has told Italian media outlets that Martini read and approved the text of the interview, intending it as a sort of "spiritual testament" to be published after his death.*

The following is an NCR *translation of the interview published in Italian by the newspaper* Corriere della Sera.

How do you see the situation of the church?

The church is tired, in the Europe of well-being and in America. Our culture has become old, our churches and our religious houses are big and empty, the bureaucratic apparatus of the church grows, our rites and our dress are pompous. Do these things, however, express what we are today? ... Well-being weighs on us. We find ourselves like the rich young man who went away sad when Jesus called him to be his disciple. I know that we can't let everything go easily. At least, however, we can seek people who are free and closest to their neighbor, like Archbishop Romero and the Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador. Where are the heroes among us who can inspire us? By no means do we have to limit them by the boundaries of the institution.

Who can help the church today?

Father Karl Rahner often used the image of the embers hidden under the ash. I see in the church today so much ash under the embers that often I'm hit with a sense of impotence. How can we liberate the embers from the ash, to reinvigorate the fires of love? For the first thing, we have to seek out these embers. Where are the individuals full of generosity, like the Good Samaritan? Who have faith like the Roman centurion? Who are enthusiastic like John the Baptist? Who dare the new, like Paul? Who are faithful like Mary Magdalene? I advise the Pope and the bishops to seek out twelve people outside the lines for administrative positions, people who are close to the poorest, who are surrounded by young people, and who try new things. We need to be with people who burn in such a way that the Spirit can spread itself everywhere.

What tools do you recommend against the exhaustion of the church?

I recommend three very strong ones. The first is conversion: the church must recognize its errors and follow a radical path of change, beginning with the pope and the bishops. The pedophilia scandals compel us to take up a path of conversion. Questions about sexuality, and all the themes involving the body, are an example. These are important to everyone, sometimes perhaps too important. We have to ask ourselves if people still listen to the advice of the church on sexual matters. Is the church still an authoritative reference in this field, or simply a caricature in the media?

The second is the Word of God. Vatican II gave the Bible back to Catholics. Only those who perceive this Word in their heart can be part of those who will help achieve renewal of the church, and who will know how to

respond to personal questions with the right choice. The Word of God is simple, and seeks out as its companion a heart that listens. ... Neither the clergy nor ecclesiastical law can substitute for the inner life of the human person. All the external rules, the laws, the dogmas, are there to clarify this internal voice and for the discernment of spirits.

Who are the sacraments for? These are the third tool of healing. The sacraments are not an instrument of discipline, but a help for people in their journey and in the weaknesses of their life. Are we carrying the sacraments to the people who need new strength? I think of all the divorced and remarried couples, to extended families. They need special protection. The church upholds the indissolubility of matrimony. It's a grace when a marriage and a family succeed ...

The attitude we hold towards extended families determines the ability of the church to be close to their children. A woman, for instance, is abandoned by her husband and finds a new companion, who takes care of her and her three children. This second love succeeds. If this family is discriminated against, not only is the mother cut out [from the church] but also her children. If the parents feel like they're outside the church, and don't feel its support, the church will lose the future generation.

Before communion, we pray: "Lord, I am not worthy ...' We know we're not worthy ... Love is a grace. Love is a gift. The question of whether the divorced can receive communion ought to be turned around. How can the church reach people who have complicated family situations, bringing them help with the power of the sacraments?

What do you do personally?

The church is 200 years behind the times. Why doesn't it stir? Are we afraid? Is it fear rather than courage? In any event, the faith is the foundation of the church. Faith, trust, courage. I'm old and sick, and I depend on the help of others. Good people around me make me feel their love. This love is stronger than the sentiment of distrust that I feel every now and then with regard to the church in Europe. Only love defeats exhaustion. God is love. Now I have a question for you: What can you do for the church?

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