

Humanization and Evangelization

Marie-Marcelle Desmarais, CND

Yes, humanization is necessary for the person to love each and every other person truly and fully and to give the Gospel of Jesus its full place in their heart. In my mission, I have had the privilege of engaging with people facing difficult challenges, in countries where violence often has the last word. In these countries, there are people experiencing all kinds of suffering and they are constantly being called upon to rise above their painful experiences.

I have often returned to the same countries ten, twenty times. Whether in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Peru, Honduras, the Middle East, in nearly 40 countries on all continents, I have seen some common threads in people's experiences. These common threads reminded me of the wounds of my people. The common thread was that people were often not ready in their psychological development to meet the challenges of the Gospel.

Approaching the Other without Fear

An in-depth work of humanization makes it possible to look at and treat the person as a human being, beyond differences in colour, social class, gender, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, religious and political ideas, and cultural behaviour—in short beyond all those differences that divide.

Making the decision to approach the unknown person in order to get to know him or her—to avoid being caught up by mistrust, fear or misinterpretations—is a process of humanization. Who can deny that this learning, tailored to humanization, is an essential way of preparing the earth for evangelization?

The First Learning Ground

During the first year of life, the human life force of love is being prepared. Experience with the caregiver is the first learning ground. While the child is one and two years old, the family becomes the place of learning. Moreover, no family is perfect. Our parents did what they could with what they had and who they were, with their own history, with their strengths, their weaknesses and their vulnerabilities. It is at this early age of one and two years old that the customs, the ways of doing or not doing, of saying or not saying are transmitted.

Happy are the children whose parents have an openness that does not nourish prejudices, but which teaches the children to approach people different from them without fear. Happy is the child whose parents are not slaves of the law, but whose wisdom and mobility allow the child to learn to approach the stranger without fear.

Once adults, we do not remember those laws learned in the family. We do not remember how we learned these customs, these instructions, and these prohibitions. Everything is buried in what is “unconscious” in us; the fact remains, however, that convictions have taken root.

The child has recorded that 'this' group of people is bad and we should be wary of 'them', that another group is the one that will save us from that which we have to protect ourselves. That is how divisions and wars take root. Children who have become adults believe what they have heard in the early years of their lives without remembering how it happened.

What comes from their family and their culture will remain in their representation of what is good, what is the best! The way that the neighbour does things may be seen as unfitting. If the parents have shown great universal openness, the child will inherit that openness without borders. But how many children will never have these experiences of humanization that allow them to learn to love broadly, without exclusion?

The Call to True Love

A priority that is laid out in the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth, the Saviour of all and for all time, is the call to true love. Love the other as yourself... Give him your tunic... She comes from Samaria, welcome her! He is wounded, no matter what group he is from, heal him.

Jesus never stops trying to open up his compatriots to the human person. He is focused not on laws or practices, but on the person. And every time, he takes care of the person. He never stops being the Good Shepherd who watches over his sheep. He came to help people discover who God is: He came to make God visible. And when He will leave us his Spirit, it will be to enable us to continue his mission, a mission of love.

Yet, love is not born magically in the person. Some conditions are needed to learn to love. These conditions are built throughout the first years of human life, because human development has its own logic.

Three Forms of Love

In a process of integral humanization, developing the strength of love makes it possible to learn to look at the 'other' as a person, to want his or her good and to be capable of sometimes choosing the good of the other person over the good of the self. Self-love allows one to give oneself the physical and psychological means to live these excesses in love and peace.

In humanization, there are three forms of love. **Reciprocal love** is the love that makes one able to trust the other and receive the trust of the other. Without trust, this love cannot be built. It is this love that builds a relationship for a couple, a community, a friendship, a fraternity.

Caring love cannot be lived unless it is freely given. It is the love that gives without waiting for a return, for an answer. This love is often that of parents who love in truth, the love of educators who want the good of the young people for whom they are responsible. In religious life, it is the love that allows the birth and growth of psychological maternity or paternity. The people consecrated to God are called to this maternity or paternity.

And there is **love in its form of universality, a love denoting wisdom!** Deciding to live this love requires a clear choice and it commits one until death. Opening oneself up to each person by deciding to look at him or her as a person, to treat him or her as a

person, and to do so no matter what the difference is and above all beyond any differences that would make one want to exclude him or her. **Universal love** is recognized by this sign... No exclusion! It is the love that calls upon us to recognize the walls inside ourselves and to tear them down by building bridges that unite. This love is a force that demands constant decisions.

It is to this universal love that Jesus calls us. Is it not this form of love that is found in the Holy Family who receives the shepherds and the Magi, people so different in their social class? It is the love that led Jesus to call Zacchaeus to come down from his tree, to choose Matthew the tax collector to become an apostle. It is this love that made him so generous to the adulterous woman, to the lepers, to the deaf and mute people of his time. It is this love that enabled Jesus to see through human dramas and perceive what was really at the heart of the 'issue'. It is the love that led him to the Cross. It is because of this love that He opened the way to the Good Thief.

Become the "Leaders"

This love requires courage because it can lead to death. We see Paul clearly place himself before the consequences of this love. But throughout the history of Salvation, in the experiences of the Old and New Testaments, in the experiences recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, we see people who cannot manage to love. How sad it is to live all your life without learning to love, especially when we have chosen a religion that is love.

Will those responsible for evangelization be called upon to become "leaders" in this close encounter between humanization and evangelization?

Marie-Marcelle Desmarais, CND, MSS, is a psychotherapist, a trainer and executive director of the Montreal Institute for Human Integral Training.