

Ecumenical Week  
Organised by the Focolare Movement

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## **The Charism of unity in the Ecumenical Movement**

**Maria Voce**

***President of the Focolare Movement***

Dearest brothers and sisters,

May Jesus be among us!

And this is possible because he himself promised, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (*Mt 18:20*). It is the Gospel phrase that guides us today and we pray it is so now.

I greet all the religious leaders who are honouring us with their presence, especially His Eminence Gennadios Zervos, Metropolitan Archbishop of Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy and Malta, the three speakers this afternoon: Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Lutheran bishop Christian Krause, and Rev Dr Martin Robra, programme executive of the World Council of Churches for Ecumenical Continuing Formation and for *the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace*.

In this talk, I would like to highlight what the spirituality of unity, or the spirituality of communion, arising from Chiara Lubich's charism, can offer to the journey towards full and visible unity in Christ, to which he himself has called us.

- a) I think this topic is of interest to all of us here. We are conscious that the wounds inflicted on the mystical body of Christ over the centuries concern all of God's people and we want to contribute to healing them together.

Jesus crucified and forsaken, who took all sins and all divisions upon himself, is asking us to recognise and love him in every painful situation, so as to make our contribution, by embracing and consuming this suffering within ourselves, through the divine alchemy which can transform suffering into love.

- b) The love of Christ as the foundation of the relationship between Christians of various Churches was sealed yesterday afternoon in the catacombs of St Sebastian with a pact, the pact of mutual love as St John said (*Jn 13:34*): "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." It's the heart of the Gospel.

This pact binds us together in Christ, in His Love. Even if we cannot receive the Eucharist together, which we long for with all our heart, we are united spiritually and know that we are united in Him because of our common Baptism. Together with the apostle Paul we ask, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" (*Rom 8:35-39*).

- c) It seems to me that in these days a third aspect has been emphasised, a fruit so to speak of living out the spirituality of unity. At the beginning of the Focolare Movement, Chiara and the first focolarine said they experienced a new presence among them of someone

who in a silent way had become part of their group. It was He who had promised "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (*Mt 18:20*).  
 Jesus among Christians of various Churches: He is our unity. (cf John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*).

Starting from this premise, I would now like to re-read with you the Five Ecumenical Imperatives, set out in the Catholic-Lutheran document "From Conflict to Communion", which was written in view of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. They are imperatives that I consider are not only for Lutherans and Catholics, but can also be lived by Christians of all Churches. They can be the basis of a fruitful ecumenical commitment, not only for theological dialogues but precisely for us too who stress, among other things, the importance of the "dialogue of life", the coming together of Christians in everyday life.

### **1. Begin from the perspective of unity**

*"First imperative: ... always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced."*<sup>1</sup>

We must start from the perspective of unity. Right from the earliest years of the Focolare Movement Chiara addressed these words to her companions: "'Jesus, who is our model, taught us two things which are ultimately *one*; that is, to be children of only one Father and to be brothers and sisters to each other."<sup>2</sup> It is the discovery that "God is love", that God is Father, a fundamental truth of our faith.

We must be sure that he is close to us, that he follows every step we take, that he is hidden behind all the painful or joyful circumstances we experience, that he knows all about us. I am struck by the words of Jesus, "But even the hairs of your head are all counted." (Luke 12:7). Why is that? Because he loves us. We must believe in his love. This is what gives meaning to our life. Shouldn't this re-discovery of God-Love be the foundation that enables us to start from the perspective of unity? By starting off together from this fundamental cornerstone of Christianity, it is possible to deepen our shared heritage, all that already unites us. We are even united by a sacramental bond, Baptism which makes us part of the one body of Christ (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*). Do we realise that Baptism makes us brothers and sisters in Christ? Then our way of thinking, speaking and relating as Christians changes. We recognise the presence of Jesus in our sister or brother; our respect and esteem for one another grows.

### **2. Let themselves be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith**

*"Second imperative: ... let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith."*<sup>3</sup>

This might make us a little fearful: to allow ourselves to be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith. Does it mean that I have to lose something of my own?

"The person next to me was created as a gift for me and I was created as a gift for the person next to me,"<sup>4</sup> Chiara Lubich affirmed. The richness of others is discovered when I love the other person with the measure of Jesus' love. Then I am ready to listen, to listen so that the other person can give the whole of themselves. This listening requires effort on my part, to empty myself of my ideas, my preconceptions, so that the other person can enter into me. By loving in this way, without self-interest, I enrich myself with the gifts the other is giving me. My horizon broadens. I understand their motives, their way of thinking.

There is a word that can help us to remember this point; it is "making yourself one". St Paul says to "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

<sup>1</sup> From Conflict to Communion, n. 239

<sup>2</sup> Chiara Lubich, *Art of Loving*, New City Press, New York 2010, p.31.

<sup>3</sup> From Conflict to Communion, n. 240.

<sup>4</sup> Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings*, New City Press, New York 2007, p. 87.

### 3. Commit themselves to seek visible unity – to strive repeatedly towards this goal

*“Third imperative: ... commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly towards this goal.”<sup>5</sup>*

How can this be done. By going back to our shared roots: the Word of God. His word is not merely something we recall but words that he addresses to all of us today. We are still in Eastertide, He is Risen and as such he continues to speak to us. And if we are his living Word then it is no longer we who live but Christ lives in us, as St Paul says.

Furthermore, right from the start, in the Focolare Movement it came spontaneously to share with one another the discoveries we make when we live the word, the experiences of living the Word. We did this today too, as mutual edification, as St Paul also emphasised.

#### 4. Jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ

*“Fourth imperative: ... jointly rediscover the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for our time.”<sup>6</sup>*

If we live the Gospel in this way, we will truly be able to rediscover the power of the Gospel for our times.

It was this very discovery of the Gospel, in the air raid shelters of Trent during the Second World War, that gave a small group of young women the strength to start a new life that then attracted people all over the world. It was telling the story of this experience of living the Gospel that fascinated the first Lutheran brothers and sisters in 1961 in Germany and it was a great discovery for everyone that it could be lived together. Thereafter thousands of brothers and sisters in various Christian churches seek to live it, to meet and share their experiences, thus becoming ‘living cells’ of the mystical Body of Christ.

#### 5. Witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world

*“Fifth imperative: ... witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world.”<sup>7</sup>*

If we live the Word, love, mutual love, with this intensity, we can truly bear witness to mercy, to God’s love. We know how much the world is waiting for this witness of ours! Because unity is not an end in itself, it is for the world, and most urgently, I would say now, for peace in the world.

We are well aware of the deeper reason for terrorism. It is resentment, compressed hatred, the desire for revenge, festering in peoples oppressed for a long time by the division of our world into two parts: the part that is rich and the part that is poor, and sometimes wretched. What’s missing, therefore, in our world, is the capacity to treat one another as brothers and sisters. What’s missing is fellowship, solidarity, sharing. Goods should be shared, but we know they don’t move on their own. We need to move people’s hearts....

Jesus said the world would recognise us as his followers, and through us would recognise him, by mutual love, by unity, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13:35).

Mutual love, unity, should be our uniform, our badge, and the badge of his Church. Let’s put all our trust in this gospel love.

Dear Brothers and sisters, I would like to end my talk emphasising what I said at the time of the “Ottmaring Declaration” in which we as Focolare Movement chose to reaffirm our ecumenical commitment, in the wake of the events in Lund.

I said: Today it no longer makes any sense for Christians to be seen as all split up. They already have little impact, and will have less and less impact if they aren’t united in bearing witness to the one Gospel, the command to love one another. If we Christians don’t know how to give this witness,

<sup>5</sup> From Conflict to Communion, n. 241

<sup>6</sup> Idem, n. 242

<sup>7</sup> Idem, n. 243

the world will not be able to meet God, because it won't be able to meet Jesus who is present wherever Christians are united in mutual love. If instead they do meet him, then faith will be born in them. They'll change their attitudes and behaviour. Priority will be given to the search for peace and justice, and the commitment to solidarity among peoples  
My wish today is that together we can set out and continue "travelling" with Jesus amongst us "so that the world may believe".

*Original in Italian*