

PASQUALE FORESI (1929-2015)

Co-founder of the Focolare Movement

Pasquale Foresi, who was born in Livorno in 1929, came from a Christian family. (His father Palmiro, was elected to the Constituent Assembly of Christian Democrats in 1946 and kept his seat during the first two parliamentary terms.) When he was just fourteen years old he ran away from home during the night to join one of the Resistance groups that were fighting for a new Italy. It was during that time that he started to consider the idea of priesthood. When he returned home, he entered the diocesan seminary in Pistoia, the city where his family then lived. Later, he attended the Gregorian University in Rome, but he did not feel fully satisfied with that life.

Meanwhile his father got to know Igino Giordani, a member of the Italian Parliament who introduced him to Chiara Lubich. The Hon. Foresi was so impressed by the young Lubich's radical way of living the Gospel that he hoped his son, who was searching for authentic Christianity, would also have the opportunity of meeting her. He organized an encounter and invited Chiara to meet his Catholic colleagues of Pistoia; but as she could not attend this meeting, she sent Graziella De Luca, one of her first companions, in her place. Owing to a misunderstanding, Graziella arrived at Pistoia a day late; and it was Pasquale who welcomed her to the Foresi home. Sheer courtesy made him ask questions about her spiritual experience, but he was so struck by her answers that he expressed the desire to meet Chiara.

It was Christmas 1949 when he met Chiara in Trent, and shortly after he decided to join the first men's Focolare community in Rome. There, he understood that this was his vocation, and his call to priesthood also resurfaced. Pasquale said: "It did not feel like entering a religious institute that was more beautiful and more holy than others, but I felt I was becoming part of a religious and civil Christian revolution that would renew the Church and humanity". In 1954 he became the first focolarino priest.

Chiara Lubich felt a special affinity with Pasquale and she asked him to share with her the leadership of the Movement.

His deep knowledge of theology made him aware of the theological and doctrinal significance of Chiara's intuitions, and he became a skilled spokesperson in the Movement's relationship with the Church, especially at the time when the newly born Movement was being studied by the Ecclesiastic Authorities.

Fr. Foresi's main role was helping Chiara in the incarnation of the charism of unity through concrete projects; such as the small town of Loppiano near Florence - a witness to gospel love, the publishing house *Città Nuova*; the University Institute Sophia, set up in Loppiano in 2007.

He recalled: "At a certain point I had the impression that my life was one big mistake, and that the positive things that maybe I had managed to accomplish were mine and not God's". He lived this spiritual turmoil as a purification that came from God. And it was precisely during this period of spiritual trial that seemed to have an impact on his physical health too, that Chiara with Fr. Foresi at her side as co-president could see the realization of so many works being accomplished in the Movement

His volumes *Teologia della socialità (Theology of Social Man)* and *Conversazioni con i focolarini (God among men)* are sources of inspiration for other authors of the Movement.

He left us for Heaven on June 14, 2015.