

# **SPIRITUALITY OF UNITY**

These pages contain the texts published on the [focolare.org](http://focolare.org) website before its restyling in November 2018. These texts are divided into sections according to topics, and the greater part of them were inserted on the website in 2011 when the previous update of the Focolare web space was made. They contain news and dossiers that can be useful to those who want to know more about the Movement's different realities.

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## Spirituality of Unity

The spirituality expressed by Chiara Lubich soon became defined as a 'collective' or better, a 'communitarian' spirituality, always in view of 'ut omnes unum sint' (jn 17,21). This spirituality unfolds into 12 cardinal points, leading from one to another:

1. God is Love
2. The Will of God
3. The Word
4. The Neighbour
5. Mutual Love
6. Jesus in the Eucharist
7. Unity
8. Jesus Forsaken
9. Mary
10. The Church
11. The Holy Spirit
12. Jesus in the Midst

In Chiara the points of the spirituality of unity were not developed through thought out plans, reflections or some theological points. Rather, this is a spirituality demanding an immediate adhesion, decisive and practical, something that brings life.

In the splendid history of the Church, from its individual members, its saints and communities there has always been a clear line and result: it's the individual that goes to God. This remains the case within the spirituality of unity, in the sense

that the individual's experience of God is unique and will never be repeated.

However, the spirituality is drawn from the charism of unity, entrusted by the Holy Spirit to Chiara, and as well as this indispensable personal spiritual experience there is also a deep emphasis on the communitarian dimension of Christian life. It is not a complete novelty, the Gospel is eminently communitarian. There have been experiences in the past which have underlined the collective aspect of the journey towards God, above all in the spiritualities rising from those who had love at the base of their spiritual life. This can be seen in the example of St Basil and his community.

Chiara Lubich brings her own spirituality, which is an original communitarian way of going to God: being one in Christ, according to the Gospel of John: "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, so may they be in us." (Jn 17,21). In Chiara this became a style of life.

A "communitarian spirituality" was foretold for our epoch by contemporary theologians and is also mentioned by the Second Vatican Council. Karl Rahner, for example, speaking of the spirituality of the Church of the future, saw it as a "fraternal communion in which it is possible to make the same basic experience of the Spirit". Vatican II, directed attention to the Church as the body of Christ and people assembled in the bond of love of the Trinity.

If St Teresa of Avila, doctor of the Church, spoke of "an interior castle", the spirituality of unity helps to build an "exterior castle", where Christ will be present and illuminate every part of it.

## God-Love

«Amidst the fury of war Chiara Lubich and her first companions were in the habit of meeting each other in bomb shelters when the sirens would sound announcing new bombings. It was the desire of these young women from Trent to be together and discover new ways of being Christian and of putting the Gospel into practice, following that startling intuition that had led them to put God-Love at the center of their interests – he alone and nothing else – at the center of their young lives. "Each event touched us deeply" Chiara later said. The lesson that God was giving us through external circumstances was very clear: All is vanity of vanities, everything passes away. But at the same time, God placed a question in my heart for all of us and, with it, the answer: "But could there be an ideal that doesn't die, that no bombs could bring down, one that we could give ourselves to?" Yes, God. We decided to make him the ideal of our lives."

God. God, who in the middle of the fury of war, which was the fruit of hatred, through the action of a special grace, manifested himself for what he truly is: Love. The leading concept upon which the Holy Spirit then constructed this entire spirituality was, therefore, God-Love (Cf. 1 Jn 4:8).

«What a change this truth, now understood in a totally new way, brings about in people when they come into contact with the movement! The Christian lives they were so faithfully living before, now appear overshadowed like the lives of

orphans. For now a discovery has been made: God is Love, God is a Father! Our heart, which had been living an exile in the night of this life, opens and rises and unites to the one who loves it, the one who takes care of everything, the one who even counts the hairs on our head.

« The joyful and painful events acquire totally new meaning: Everything is foreseen and willed by the love of God. Nothing can make us fearful. This is an exciting faith which strengthens us, which makes us glory in it. It's a faith that brings tears to the eyes of those who experience it for the first time. It's a gift of God that makes us shout: "We have believed in love ». The choice of God who is Love, as the ideal of our life, was the first foundation that was laid, the first requirement of this new spirituality that had blossomed in our hearts. Thus we had found the one to live for: God-Love.»

## The Will of God

Chiara and her first companions wondered what attitude they should have in order to demonstrate to God that he was truly the centre of their interests. In reality they were asking themselves how they could translate into life their new ideal: God-Love. It soon appeared obvious to them that they should return God's love for them. Their life would no longer have any sense if it were not "a small flame of this infinite brazier burning with the flame of divine Love: love responding to Love". And it seemed such a great and sublime gift to be able to love God that they often said: "We shouldn't say "we must love God" but

“Oh, to be able to love you, Lord! To be able to love you with this tiny heart!” They recalled a sentence from the Gospel seemed to leave no escape for anyone who wanted to live a Christian life: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 17:21). Therefore, doing the will of God was their grand opportunity to love God. And God and his will coincided.

Chiara wrote: “God was like the sun. And a ray of this sun was reaching out to each one of us, the divine will for me, for my friends, for everyone. There is a single sun, different rays, but always ‘rays of sun’. A single will of God different for each person, but always will of God. Our task was to walk within our ray without ever departing from it. And we had to follow along this ray in the time that was allotted us. No wandering into the past or fantasizing about a future. It was better to abandon the past to the mercy of God, since it was no longer in our possession; and the future would only be lived once it became present.

“Only the present was in our hands. And this was where we had to concentrate our mind, heart, and strength in doing the divine will, so that God would reign in our life. Just as someone travelling by train would never go walking through the aisles in order to reach his destination sooner, but re-main seated, so we should remain in the present. The train of time moves forwards on its own. And it wasn’t very difficult to know what God would want from us. He expresses his desires through su-periors, the Holy Scripture, the duties of one’s state in life, through circumstances and inspirations. Minute by minute,

illuminated and assisted by actual grace, we would be building our holiness; or better, by doing the will of an Other – of God – he would be edifying himself within us.

“Doing God’s will doesn’t mean, as is often suggested, something that we must be resigned to. Rather, it is the greatest divine adventure that could happen to a person; following not your own ti-ny will, not your own limited goals but rather those of God, fulfilling that design of God that he has for each one of his sons and daughters, a divine plan, unimaginable and so rich. Loving God by do-ing his will became the second cardinal point of our spirituality of unity.”

## The Word

The Gospel. The adventure led by Chiara Lubich was based on just one ‘text’: the Bible, the Gospel, the Word of God. For them it was only in the pages of the Gospel that they found the way of life that took them to God. It was during that period that an idea Chiara already had when she was teaching took shape and was put into action: the ‘Word of Life’, used by the ‘focolarino’ world and beyond. They lived a sentence from the Gospel and the novelty, for that time, was that Chiara and her first companions, to help one another and to grow together, told one another of the fruits they had experienced through living the Word.

Chiara wrote: ‘The War was still raging. Every time the air-raid siren sounded, all we could take into the shelter with us was one small book: the Gospel. We opened it and the words,

even though we already knew them quite well, because of the new charism, were lit up as if they had a candle beneath them, they enflamed our hearts and pushed us to put them into practise straightaway. We were attracted to them all and tried to live them one after another. I read for example; “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt 19,19). Our neighbour. Where was our neighbour? There, next to us in the all the people who had been hurt by the War, wounded, without clothes, without houses, hungry and thirsty. We immediately dedicated ourselves to them in many ways.

‘The Gospel assured us: “Ask and you shall receive.” (Mt 7,7). We asked for the needs of the poor – and, extraordinarily for war-time – we received everything we needed from God! One day, and this story is one of the first experiences we had and is often told, a poor person asked us for a pair of shoes size 42. Knowing that Jesus was in the poor person, I turned to the Lord, in the church of St Clare near to a hospital of the same name, with this prayer: “Give me a pair of shoes size 42 for you in that poor person”. I came out and a lady came up and gave me a parcel. I opened it and it was a pair of shoes size 42.

‘We read in the Gospel: “Give and you will be given” (Lk 6,38). We gave and gave and each time we received in return. We had just one apple left in the house. We gave it to the poor person who asked. And we saw the next morning, maybe from a relative, a dozen apples arrive. We gave those to others who were in need, and in the evening a whole suitcases of apples arrived. That’s how it was, all the time.

‘These events, one after the other, amazed and enchanted us. We had great joy and that joy spread. Jesus had

promised and still now he keeps His promise. He is not, therefore, a reality of the past, but of the present. And the Gospel is true. This discovery gave wings to our steps on the journey we had just begun. When we explained this to people who were curious about our happiness in such sad and troubled times; they understood that they hadn't simply found a few girls in a young Movement but Jesus alive".

## Love for neighbour

At the time that Chiara and her first companions began their adventure in Trent (Northern Italy) the town had a population of about ten thousand. The girls' actions had a real effect on the people and also on the Church. Both the elderly and the young were left speechless seeing the unusual life lived by the girls living in the 'little house' in Piazza Cappuccini, the first 'focolare'. In this humble apartment the poor were at home. In fact the social problems of the city, ruined by the War, were problems the girls made their own. They believed that they could solve the problems by simply believing the truth in the words of the Gospel. By loving each neighbour one after the other.

Chiara wrote: 'Among all the Words in the gospel we noticed immediately all those for our charism concerned specifically with evangelical love towards each neighbour, not only the poor, as when we read in the Gospel that Jesus had said "Whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine (and that means everyone), you did it

for me.” (Mt 25,40). Our old way of understanding our neighbour and loving them crumbled. If Christ was in some way in everyone, discriminations couldn't be made, nor could preferences. Our normal way of reasoning of classifying people was thrown into the air: fellow country man or foreigner, old or young, beautiful or ugly, likeable or not, rich or poor, Christ was behind each one, Christ was in each one. “Another Christ” really was each neighbour – if grace enriched his soul – or “another Christ”, a Christ proud – if he was still far from Him.

Living like this, we realised that our neighbour was our way to reach God. It seemed that our neighbour was an arch we had to pass under in order to meet God. We experienced this right from the start. In the evening, during prayers or in a moment of recollection, after we had loved God in our brothers all day we had such union with God. Who gave us that consolation, that interior balm which was so new, celestial if not Christ who, from His Gospel lived “give and you shall be given”? (Lk 6,38) We had loved Him all day in those brothers and now He loved us. This inner gift was such a benefit! They were the first experiences of the spiritual life, of the reality of a kingdom which is not of this earth. So, in the marvellous way that the Spirit showed us, love for our brother was a new cornerstone of our spirituality.'

*Chiara Lubich, Nascita di una spiritualità, in Enzo M. Fondi e Michele Zanzucchi, Un popolo nato dal Vangelo, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2003, p. 18*

## Mutual love

Chiara and her companions really discovered what the Gospel was when they took it with them into the air raid shelters and read it together, before then they hadn't really known it: no-one had ever spoken to them so clearly. Jesus always acts from God. In return for the little you give him, He showers you with gifts. You are alone and you find yourself surrounded by thousands of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and everything you need from God which then you can share with those who have nothing. This was how their faith was strengthened, it was based on experience, that no human situation or difficulty could not find explicitly or implicitly an answer in that little book which gives the words of heaven. The adherents of the nascent Movement plunged themselves in those words, were fed by them, were re-evangelised and experienced how what Jesus said and promised was unfailingly true. The discovery of the 'new commandment' inflamed them to the point that mutual love became their manner, their way of being. And it was the same love that attracted many people, of every age and social class to come to their gatherings. Loving each other reciprocally was not optional for them, but their way of life that had to be shown to the world.

Chiara wrote: 'The War continued. The bombardments were relentless. There were insufficient shelters and we constantly faced the possibility of finding ourselves in front of God. All of this gave us only one desire in our hearts: to put into practise in those moments, which could have been our last, the will of God that was dearest to Him. We then remembered the

commandment that Jesus said was His and new: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:12-13).

‘We said that Jesus came bringing with Him, from his homeland, his own customs and habits. ‘His’ commandment brought the law of heaven on to the earth, which is, the love between the three persons of the Holy Trinity. We looked each other in the face and each one declared; “I am ready to give my life for you”. As we had to be ready to give our lives for one another, it was logical that, meanwhile, we should meet the thousands of needs that fraternal love demanded: to share joys, sufferings, our few possessions, our own spiritual experiences. We made ourselves do it so that above all else mutual love would reign amongst us.

‘One day, in the first Focolare, we took out our few and poor goods from the cupboard, and piled them in the middle of the room, so that each one of us could take the few things we needed and what was left over we gave to the poor. We were ready to put our wages in common, and all the small and large goods that we had and would have in the future. We were also ready to put in common our spiritual goods.... Our desire for holiness was held in that one choice: God, which excluded every other objective, but included, obviously, the holiness he had thought of for us.

‘Then, there were the difficulties caused by our own imperfections that each one had and with one another, so we decided not to see one another with human eyes, which only notice the speck in the other, forgetting the plank in their own,

but those eyes that forgive all and forget all. We felt we had to forgive each other, imitating merciful God, so we made between us a sort of pact of mercy: that is to get up each morning and see one another as 'new', as if those 'defects' never existed.

## Eucharistic Jesus

The Eucharist has always held an importance place in the life of Chiara Lubich, ever since her childhood. Both for her, personally, and in her experience with her first companions. The same was true throughout the decades in which the Movement was being built: it was marked by the presence of the Eucharist. And it couldn't have been otherwise, since the Eucharist is the soul, the heart of the Church's life. The action of the Holy Spirit, through the charism of unity, caused a great attraction in Chiara and her first companions for the Eucharist, so much so that they couldn't wait for the moment of the Mass when they could share their life with Eucharistic Jesus. And later, when they began to travel around Italy, the first focolarine passionately peered from the train windows in search of church towers, so that they could look at them. There was the Eucharistic Jesus, there was their love. There is a wonderful interconnection between the Eucharist and the spirituality of unity.

Chiara wrote: "The fact that the Lord focused us on Jesus' prayer for unity to begin this Movement, meant that he had to give us a forceful push towards the one who can accomplish this

unity: Jesus in the Eucharist. Indeed, just as the tiny newborns instinctively nourish themselves as their mothers' breasts, unaware of what they're doing, likewise, from the very start of the Movement, it was noteworthy how many people became daily communicants. How is this to be explained? What the instinct is for a newborn, the Holy Spirit is for an adult newly born into the new life that the Gospel brings. He is thrust toward the "heart" of Mother Church and he feeds himself on the most precious nectar that she has, in which he finds the secret of the life of unity, and of his own divinization.

In fact, the work of the Eucharist is to make us God through participation. Mixing together the flesh which has been enlivened by the Holy Spirit and vitalized by Christ with our own, he divinizes us in our soul and in our body. The Church could be defined as: Oneness brought about by the Eucharist, because it is composed of divinized men and women, made God, united to Christ who is God among them. This God with us is present in every tabernacle of the world and he has gathered into his heart all our confidences, all our joys, all our fears..."

« How much comfort Eucharistic Jesus provided for us in our trials, when no one would give us an audience because the Movement was under study! He was always there, at all hours, waiting for us to come, waiting to tell us: In the end, the Head of the Church is me. And through struggle and suffering of every kind, who gave us strength, when we thought that we would have died many times if Eucharistic Jesus and Jesus in our midst, on whom we nourished ourselves, had not held us up? ».

## Unity

In May of 1944, gathered together in the darkened cellar which had become the bedroom of Natalia Dallapiccola in the basement of her family home – she had moved there to find some protection from the bombardments – Chiara and her friends from Trent read the Gospel by the light of a candle. They opened it by chance to the passage containing Jesus' last prayer before his death: "Father, that all be one" (Jn 17:21). This is an extraordinary and complex text, Jesus' "testament", which has been studied by scholars and theologians throughout the Christian world. But in those days it was a bit forgotten, because it was so mysterious, to say the least. This passage could have seemed too difficult for girls like Chiara, Natalia, Doriana and Graziella. Yet they sensed that this was their "word of the Gospel: Unity."

On one of those days in Trent, crossing the Fersina Bridge, Chiara had told one of these companions: "I've understood how we are to love each other according to the Gospel: to the point of being consumed in one." Later, in Christmas 1946, the girls chose a radical phrase which would be their motto: "Unity or death."

In 2000 Chiara wrote: "One day, I was with my companions and, opening a small copy of the Gospels, we read: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (Jn 17:21). It was Jesus' prayer before dying. Because of his presence among us and because of a the gift of his Spirit, I seemed to understand those strong and difficult words, and there was born in my heart the certainty that we

had been born for this page of the Gospel: for unity; that is, to contribute to the unity of all people with God and with each other.

Sometime later, conscious of the divine boldness of such a program, which only God could bring about, we knelt around an altar and asked Jesus to realize that dream of his using even us if he wished, it were in his plans. Often, in the beginning, faced with the immensity of the task, we became dizzy and, seeing the crowds that we should gather in unity, we were taken by shock. But, little by little, gently, the Lord made us understand that our task was like that of a small child who throws a stone into a lake. The tiny stone causes rings to be formed which continue to extend, reaching wider and wider, and they can seem to continue forever. And so we understood that we would have to create unity around us, in our own surroundings, wherever we found ourselves. Then, when we went to Heaven, we would be able to look down and see the circles widening still more, becoming gigantic, until the end of time, when the plan of God would be accomplished.

Right from the first moment, it was clear to us that this unity had only one name: Jesus. For us, being one meant being Jesus. In fact, only Christ make two into one, because his love is the emptying of self, it's non egoism, it makes us enter deeply into the hearts of others.

The things I wrote during those times betray our wonder before such a sublime and supernatural reality: 'Unity! But who could dare to speak of it? It's ineffable as God! You feel it, you see it, you enjoy it, but... it's ineffable! Everyone rejoices in its presence, everyone suffers in its absence. It's peace, joy, love,

ardor, an atmosphere of heroism, of the highest generosity. It's Jesus among us!'".

## Jesus Forsaken

During the summer of 1949, Giordani went to visit Chiara who had gone away for a period of rest in the valley of Primiero, in Tondaico, in the mountains of Trentino. They were intensely living the Gospel passage concerning Jesus' abandonment. On the 12th of July Chiara wrote: "Jesus Forsaken! The important thing is that when he passes by we are attentive to hear what he wants to say to us, because he always has something new to tell us. Jesus forsaken wants us perfect: He is the only Teacher, Jesus, and he wants to take advantage of all circumstances to mold us, to round off the sharp edges of our personalities, to make us holy. The only thing we must do is to take in all these voices that arise from the circumstances as his voice. All that happens around me happens for me, it's all a choral rendition of the love of God for me."

When summer ended, it was time to leave the Primiero valley and return to the city. On a piece of paper with the letterhead of the Italian Senate Chamber, which had been lent to her by Giordani, Chiara jotted down a text which is now famous and begins with the line: "I have only one spouse on earth, Jesus forsaken..." Her descent from that "little Tabor" marked the announcement that the Abandoned One is the way to unity. "I'll go through the world searching for him in every

instant of my life,” she wrote on that paper. And so Jesus forsaken is the “secret” to unity.

In 2000 Chiara wrote: “Right from the start we understood that fullness had another side to it, the tree had its roots. The Gospel covers you in love, but demands everything from you. “If the grain of wheat doesn’t fall to the earth and die – we read in the Gospel of John – it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). And the personification of this is Jesus Crucified, whose fruit was the redemption of humankind. Jesus Crucified! One episode from those early months in 1944, gave us a new understanding of him. Through a particular circumstance, we came to know that the greatest suffering of Jesus and, therefore, his greatest act of love, was when on the cross he experienced the abandonment by the Father: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” This touched us to the depths. And our young age, our enthusiasm, but especially the grace of God, urged us to choose only him in his abandonment, as the means to realize our ideal of love.

“From that moment on, we seemed to discover his countenance everywhere. He had experienced within himself people’s separation from God and from each other, and he had felt the Father far from him. We saw him not only in all our personal sufferings, which were never lacking, but in those of our neighbor, often alone, abandoned, forgotten, in the separation between generations, between rich and poor, within the very Church at times, and, later, between churches, then between religions and between persons of different convictions.

But these wounds didn't frighten us. On the contrary, because of our love for him in his abandonment, they attracted us. He had shown us how to face them, how to live them, how to cooperate in overcoming them when, after the abandonment, he placed his spirit in his Father's hands: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" giving to humankind the possibility of being restored to itself and to God, and he showed us the way. And so he manifested himself to be the key to unity, the remedy for every disunity. He was the one who recomposed unity between us each time it cracked. In him we recognized and loved the great and tragic divisions of humankind and of the Church. He became our only Spouse. And our life with such a Spouse was so rich and so fruitful that it compelled me to write a book, a love letter, like a song, a hymn of joy and of gratitude to him."

## Mary

Mary, the Mother of God, has been present in the life of the Movement since the beginning, and even before that through an experience Chiara Lubich had in 1939 when visiting the little house of the family of Nazareth in the shrine at Loreto, Italy. Chiara very often recalled an episode when, during heavy bombing in the Second World War, which could have killed her and her first companions, she understood something about Mary: 'Covered with dust that completely filled the air, almost miraculously I was able to stand up, and in the midst of the cries of those around me, I said to my companions " I had felt a deep

sorrow in my soul as my life was in danger: it was the sorrow of no longer being able to recite on earth the Hail Mary". At that time I could not grasp the sense of those thoughts. Perhaps it was to explain that being given life again, through the grace of God, we would be able to give glory to Mary with the Movement that was being born'. The fact that the official name for the Focolare Movement is the 'Work of Mary' comes as no surprise. Nor is it so strange that we use the title Mariapolis (City of Mary) for many things: the main meetings of the Movement are known as Mariapolis as are the little towns. Each conference centre is known as a Mariapolis Centre and there is also a Mariapolis magazine.

Chiara wrote in 2000: 'Mary used with our Movement the same manner as the Church: remaining hidden in the background to enable her Son who is God to be clearly seen. But when the moment arrived for, we could say, her official arrival, in our movement, she showed herself, or better, God revealed her to us, as great to the degree that she knew how to disappear. It was in 1949, during a period of special graces an "illuminative period of our history). We saw Mary as a rare and unique creature, who had been drawn into the life of the Holy Trinity, and she was all Word of God, all dressed in the Word of God.

'And so strong was our impression of this understanding that we could never forget it; it seemed that only angels could utter something of her. Seeing her like this attracted us to her, and we developed a new love for her. Love which was the evangelical answer, shown more clearly in our soul for what she really was: Mother of God. Theotokos (God-bearer). She was

not, as we knew her from before, only the young girl from Nazareth, the most beautiful creature in the world, the heart that contains and surpasses the sum total of the love of all earthly mothers put together; she was the Mother of God. In that moment, certainly because of a grace from God, with this new understanding of her, Mary revealed a dimension of herself we had almost completely ignored till then. Before that, to make a comparison, we saw Mary before Christ and the saints just as in the sky the moon (Mary) is before the sun (Christ) and the stars (the saints). Now it was different: we saw the Mother of God as an enormous blue sky that embraces the sun itself, which is God.

This new, luminous understanding of Mary, didn't stay as pure contemplation (...) It became clear for us that Mary was a model for us, she showed what we should be, whilst we saw each one of us as a 'potential' Mary.'

*CHIARA LUBICH, Nascita di una spiritualità, in ENZO M. FONDI E MICHELE ZANZUCCHI, Un popolo nato dal Vangelo, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2003, pp. 29-32*

## The Church

One day in the 1940s, at the dawn of the Movement, a bishop sent for the young girls from Trent (Northern Italy). Unaware of the reason for the invitation Chiara was pensive. The girls prayed at length before arriving at the imposing building of the bishop's residence, in Piazza Fiore. They described the real revolution that was happening in their city as a result of their actions almost without being aware. They

explained frankly that they were ready to destroy everything that had been built over the months if the bishop asked them to. Their thought was 'God speaks in the bishop'. The only thing that interested them was God. Mons. Carlo De Ferrari listened to Chiara and her companions and smiled at them pronouncing a simple phrase which remains to this day, 'Here is the finger of God'.

His approval for and benediction of the Movement accompanied them up to his death; an example of his support was shown when the numbers of young men and women wishing to enter the Focolare leaving their homes and possessions was growing, the bishop said that this could only happen if they had the approval of their parents. This act silenced many rumours. For Chiara and her first companions the existence and importance of the Church was the only certain reality. In time the spirituality of unity saw the Church essentially and fundamentally as communion.

Chiara wrote in 2000: 'There is a phrase that Jesus says in the gospel which moves me deeply "Whoever listens to you (the apostles), listens to me" (Lk 10,16) (...) The charism brought us in a completely new way into the mystery of the Church, we were living as a little Church. Anticipating by many years the definition from the council of Church – Communion, the spirituality of unity made us experience and understand what being Church meant and how to live with greater awareness. We understood it was logical for this to happen, through the presence of Christ among us.

'If we stay with the fire we become fire, and if we have Jesus in our midst we become other Jesus. St Bonaventure said

“Where two or three are united in Christ’s name, there is the Church”, and Tertullian: “Where three (are gathered), even if they are lay people, there is the Church”. Through Christ in our midst, we are made Church, and so a real passion for it is born within us. From love a new understanding of the Church was born where we all found life: we understood the sacraments in a new way. The dogmas of the Church were illuminated for us. We felt in our element being Church, through the strength of communion of love that united us and grafted us onto the institutional reality, and we experienced Her maternal love even in the most difficult moments.’

*CHIARA LUBICH, Nascita di una spiritualità, in ENZO M. FONDI E MICHELE ZANZUCCHI, Un popolo nato dal Vangelo, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2003, pp. 23-24*

## Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit really is the ‘unknown God’. Many speak of him but few know who he is, how he acts, of what beauty and with what divine imagination he clothes himself. Even without showing himself directly, Chiara Lubich and her first companions realised that He was at work from the very first life beats of the Movement. A God, who kept well hidden, the embodiment of love teaching them what Love is. He the communicator, the love between the Father and the Son, he is the ‘light breath’.

Chiara wrote: ‘Right from the start of our new life, we benefitted from his actions, day after day, sometimes gentle, sometimes strong and occasionally violent; and we never

realised it was him. Throughout, from the first choice of God-Love, to the light that illuminated the words of the Gospel, the revelation of Jesus Forsaken, to joy, peace and light that we felt rise up in our hearts, living the new commandment, it was none other than the Holy Spirit at work. It could be said that the whole story of the Movement could be rewritten and be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Only now we can see that he was the real protagonist of our adventure, it was he who moved everything.

‘Now that he and what he has been for us has been revealed to us we can retrace the luminous steps, countless signs of his constant and unpredictable actions. The inner voice which led us in our new way, the special atmosphere which gave joy to our meetings, the powerful release of hidden energy, that which purifies and renews, the divine alchemy which changes suffering into love, the experiences of death and resurrection: all these, and many other surprising phenomena which accompanied us through life, have only one name, which we have learnt to recognise, to be infinitely grateful to and feel pushed to ask his intervention in all we do each day, from the simplest task to the most demanding. He has given us the courage to face the crowds, leave our country, suffer discomforts, opposition, often with joy. But the deepest effect, the most radical, the most typical is the bond of unity between us.

‘Our mysticism needs at least two people made God through participation, between whom the Holy Spirit really moves, that is the third, God, who consumes all into one, one God: “As I in you”, Jesus said to the Father. The Holy Spirit is the

gift that Jesus gave us so that we could be like him and the Father. Without doubt the Holy Spirit was in us before, as we were Christians; but here there was a new enlightenment, a new manifestation within us, which made us sharers and actors in a new Pentecost, together with those other ecclesial movements who make the new face of the Church.’

*CHIARA LUBICH, Nascita di una spiritualità, in ENZO M. FONDI E MICHELE ZANZUCCHI, Un popolo nato dal Vangelo, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2003, pp. 28-29*

## Jesus in the Midst

Perhaps there is a better way to explain the experience the focolarine had at the beginning – living, as they soon learnt to say, ‘with Jesus in their midst’ – than the words of His disciples after they had met the Risen Lord at Emmaus: “Didn’t our hearts burn within in us, when he talked with us as we walked along the road?” (Lk 24,32). Jesus is always Jesus, and we know from Scripture that when He is present, even only spiritually, He is still Jesus and, Christ’s love burns within our hearts: life. When He is recognised we are moved to say: “Stay with us Lord, evening falls” (Lk 24,29). The experience of the disciples at Emmaus is essential for all those involved in the spirituality of unity. Nothing has value within the Movement if the promised presence of Jesus in their midst is not constantly sought – “Where two or three are united in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18,20) -, this presence enlivens, widens horizons, consoles and draws charity and truth.

Chiara wrote: ‘Having put mutual love into action, we felt a new certainty in our life, greater determination, a fullness of life. How come? It was immediately obvious: through this love we had fulfilled the words of Jesus: “Where two or three are united in my name (that is, in my love) there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18,20). Jesus, silently, came into our group as our invisible brother. So we then had the fount of love and light present among us. We didn’t want to lose Him again. We understood better what His presence was when, due to our shortcomings, His presence faded.

It’s not that in those moments we tried return to the world we had left; the presence of “Jesus in our midst” was too strong, for us to be attracted to the vanities of the world, the divine presence had lessened them. Rather, as a person who is shipwrecked grabs onto anything in order to save himself, so we too tried through whatever way the Gospel suggested, to repair the unity that had been broken. And as two pieces of wood crossed over one another consume one another in the flames, so, if we wanted to always live with Jesus present in our midst, we needed to live virtues in each present moment (patience, prudence, meekness, poverty, purity..) they are necessary so that spiritual unity with others will not lessen. We understood that Jesus in our midst is not gained once and for all, because Jesus is life, is dynamic (...).

“Where two or more”: these divine and mysterious words, very often, when being acted on, appear wonderful. Where two or more... and Jesus doesn’t specify who. He leaves it anonymous. Where two or more .. whoever they are: two or three repentant sinners who meet in His name; two or more

young people as we were; two, one older and one very young.... Where two or more...and, in living those words, we have seen barriers fall on every front. Where two or more... of different countries: the barrier of nationalism fell. Where two or more... from different races: the barrier of racism fell. Where two or more... also between people who have been opposites through culture, class, age ...All could be, had to be united in the name of Christ (...).

Jesus in the midst of us: was a formidable experience. His presence was abundant reward for every sacrifice made, justified every step taken in this journey, closer to Him and for Him, gave sense to things, circumstances, comforted sufferings, tempered excessive joy. And whoever among us, without cynicism and reasoning, believed in His words with the enchantment of a child and put them into practise, enjoyed this foretaste of heaven, which is the kingdom of God in the midst of people united in His name”.

## Living The Charism

A person’s life shouldn’t be compartmentalized, though it often is. No double, triple, quadruple lives. No different compartments: when you’re with the family, at work or in your parish, at the sport center, school or university. The “culture of unity”, born from the charism of unity can lead a person to the full realization of his human potential within the light of principles that are contained in the Gospel. This unitary way of

living must obviously be reflected in each of the areas in which an individual person finds himself living and acting.

In 1968, Chiara wrote: “Love is light and, like a ray of light that passes through a drop of water, it unfolds into a rainbow of colors for us to admire. All the colors are light and they, in turn, divide into an infinity of shades. And just as a rainbow is red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet – Jesus’ life in us could be said to have different colors, to be expressed in various ways, each different from the other.

**Red. For example, love is communion, it brings us to communion.** Jesus in us, who is Love, could work communion.

**Orange. Love is never closed in on itself, it is diffusive by nature.** Jesus in us, Love, would irradiate love.

**Yellow. Love elevates the soul.** Jesus in us would raise our soul to God; that’s what prayer is.

**Green. Love heals.** Jesus, love in the heart, would be the health of our soul.

**Blue. Love gathers people in assembly.** Jesus in us, since he is Love, would unite our hearts again.

**Indigo. Love is a font of wisdom.** Jesus in us, Love, would illuminate us.

**Violet. Love brings the many into one; it is unity.** Jesus in us would meld us into one.

These are the seven principle expressions of the love that we feel called to live, and this number seven signifies something infinite.”

## Economy and Work

Their awareness that God shows his love through the circumstances of life, even the painful ones, gave the desire to the first focolarine who were in danger of losing their lives beneath the bombs, that they should be buried together in a single tomb with the inscription: "We have believed in love." This awareness of being loved by God made them able to be ready to give their lives each for the other. This led to the sharing of all their spiritual and material possessions, the sharing of all their aspirations, of their fears, and their dreams.

Giosi Guella, one of the first focolarine shares about the first living conditions of Chiara and her first companions: "There wasn't anything in Piazza Cappuccini. But, at the same time, there was everything: for us and for others. It was logical that there shouldn't be anything: if there was something, we gave it away. We returned home with our salaries, and put them in common." Our jobs, balancing our budget, studying, teaching, doing house chores, since they were all seen as service, became the concrete occasions to love our neighbors. Service was the rule of the community that was forming around the first Focolare and made you think of the first Christians who 'were one heart and one soul and didn't have any needy among them" (cf Acts 4:32-35).

Whoever adheres to the charism of unity, in one way or another communion of heart becomes a natural thing, putting into common the things one has: for some it means everything, for others something, for others what is extra. From these expressions of communion a far-reaching project has also been

born, even from a theoretical point of view: the Economy of Communion, which is the mature and integral expression of a way of understanding the human person and living in service of him. Hundreds of businesses around the world belong to the Economy of Communion. In these businesses, work is envisioned as a way of nobilization of the human person. Legality and justice are daily priorities.

Chiara Lubich wrote: “The magna charta of Christian Social Doctrine begins there, where Mary sings: “He has put down the mighty from their thrones, he has raised up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (cf. Lk 1: 53-53). The highest and most uncontrollable revolution is found in the Gospel. And, perhaps, it is part of God’s plan that even in these times, immersed in finding solutions for social problems, it will be Our Lady who will give a hand to Christians in building, consolidating, constructing and showing to the world a new society in which the Magnificat will be powerfully echoed.”

## Witness and Spreading

The joy of being loved by God cannot be hidden. It signifies the discovery of that golden thread that joins to-gether all the events of one’s life; it’s that indispensable tile which completes the mosaic of human experience. It’s true happiness. It can be seen on people’s faces, in their eyes, in their actions. It takes root in the depths of a person and unleashes buried

energies that can no longer be still. It's a contagious and liberating joy that helps us to see the events of life correctly.

It was the same story for everyone in the early days of the Movement, everyone who drew close to the Movement followed this same track. It's what happened to Graziella De Luca in Massaia Hall, in Trent, where the newly-born Focolare community would meet. "As Chiara spoke, with the eyes of my soul I could see a very great light and I realized that this light was God, endless Love. The understanding was simultaneous to the light. Saying "I realized" implies a lapse of time. It was an immediate understanding. It was God, infinite Love, satisfying my soul, there was no emptiness left inside me. It was what I had always been searching for."

The experience of being loved by God and responding with love is the common plot of every story that is shared in environments where the Focolare is at work. Whether in small sharing groups or in the large public gatherings promoted by the Movement, it is a thrust toward universal brotherhood that begins in the place where you live in the present moment: in the family, at school, at work, even on a hospital bed. It's this natural personal and communitarian spreading that leads to a deep inculturating of the Gospel and of the charism of unity in every continent and country.

Stressing how our age is called to live unity, Chiara Lubich wrote: "(...) if it is lived, its reflections on society will quickly become obvious. And one of these will be mutual esteem between States, between peoples. This is somewhat unusual. We have become strongly accustomed to seeing the boundaries between peoples, fearing the other's power, unless

to join powers for our own benefit. But we think it difficult to act – since popular morality has never reached this point – only out of love for another people. But when the life of the Mystical Body is so developed among individuals who actually love their neighbours – black or white, red or yellow – as themselves, it will be easy to transplant this law to between States. And we'll witness a new phenomenon, for love either finds or makes us similar, and nations will learn from what is better in the other and each people's virtues will be put into motion for the enrichment of all. Then there will truly be unity and variety and a new people will blossom in our world which, though child of this earth will be formed by heavenly laws, and be called "People of God".

*CHIARA LUBICH, Scritti Spirituali/1, Città Nuova, Roma 1978, p.158*

## Spirituality and prayer

Natalia Dallapiccola, the first woman to follow Chiara Lubich in the focolare, once shared: "One night, sitting around a table, which was the only piece of furniture that had survived, seeing with the light of a candle, because a blackout had prevented us from using the electricity, Chiara read: 'As I have loved you, so must you love each other. Everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love each other.' Those words," continued Natalia, "fell like oil on fire. We were anxious to know Jesus' deepest desire. We were looking for a word that could tell us at once, precisely what he wanted from us. And here it was, the word that synthesized it, our eureka moment. And so,

before going to school or to work or to the shop, before going out to bring something to the poor, even before praying, we said that there had to be the very love of Jesus between us, because this is what he wanted. And when we left each other that night, we felt that our lives were changed, they had acquired a different flavour, they had discovered their reason.”

The personal life of prayer is the lifeblood for those who adhere to the spirituality of unity. The relationship with God is the basis of every action. But this life of prayer is also profoundly communitarian: from the songs intoned during shared holidays in the Trentine mountains of the 50’s, to the more contemporary songs of Gen Verde and Gen Rosso, from heartfelt participation in the daily liturgy to evening prayer together in the community that embraces the world. The focolarini live their spirituality of communion in every action. This communion isn’t limited to just moments of intimate prayer, but also has reflections in their personal and social lives. A higher sense of justice is born, for example, the need for legality in society, which the “Communion and Law” section of the Movement strives to promote through different projects.

Chiara Lubich once wrote: «We have an interior life and an external life. Each one blossoms from the other; each is rooted in the other; each is the foliage of the other on the tree of our life.

The interior life is nourished by the external life. Insofar as I penetrate into the soul of my brother, so far do I penetrate in God who is within me. Insofar as I penetrate in God who is within me, so far do I penetrate in my brother.

God-me-the brother is an entire world, an entire kingdom...»

In another place she writes: «The greater our love for others, the greater our love for God. »

## Love which Heals

The seasons of life for the individual and also for the collective reveal their specific goal if they are fully lived. Holding to their right time makes us discover the message which every moment contains. The Psalm says: “Teach us how short our life is, so that we may become wise.” (Ps 90,12). Wisdom is the mother who teaches us to recognise that which does not pass and all that through eternity has been shown through time. Calm fears, resolve anxiety, fills emptiness, opens hearts to neighbours.

“Sickness has healed me – a mother writes - , it has brought me a complete vision of existence which the course of my life had taken from me. Now I seem to know how to love my family.”

Love is perpetuated through the ages in the biographies of those who have passed before us and whose stories allow their lives to reach us. This is the communion of Saints.

This aspect highlights the relationship between the person and not only Life but also Death.

Chiara Lubich wrote in 1973:

‘Were I to leave this earth today, and were you to ask me for a final word about what our Ideal is, I would have to say,

certain that it would be understood in its deepest sense: “Be a family.” Are some among you suffering from spiritual or moral trials? Be understanding to them, as a mother would, and even more. Enlighten them through your words and through your example. Do not allow them to lack the warmth of a family, but rather increase it. Are any among you in physical pain? May they be our preferred brothers and sisters. Suffer with them. Try to understand their pain completely. Share with them the fruits of your apostolic activities so that they know that, more than anyone else, they have contributed to them. Are any among you approaching their final moments of life? Imagine you are in their place, and do for them what you would want done for yourself, until their very last breath. Are any of you rejoicing because of a success, or for any other reason? Rejoice with them, that their consolation may not fade and their hearts not close, so that their joy may belong to everyone. Are some moving to another place? Do not let them leave without filling their hearts with a single inheritance: the sense of a family, so that they may take it with them wherever they go. Never place any kind of activity, whether spiritual or apostolic, before the spirit of being a family with the brothers or sisters with whom you are living.’

*CHIARA LUBICH, A Legacy: Be a Family, Essential Writings, p. 48 New City, London 2007*

## Harmony and Environment

Marilen Holzhauser, one of the first focolarine explained: “For us every object we have has to have a reason or purpose”.

From the start Chiara Lubich and the first followers in her adventure have had their own style in living, dressing and home furnishing which was simple and moderate. They understood that beauty revealed in the mystery of a flower that consumes only what it needs and in this way its real beauty. Beauty becomes the splendour of truth. Harmony of simplicity makes us discover 'the beauty which will save the world' and that world will save beauty.

In the Letter to Diogneto, referring to the first Christians we read: 'Living in the Greek and Barbarian cities, as we each have, and adapting ourselves in each place to the customs of dressing, eating and so on, we give witness to an admirable and undoubtedly paradoxical way of living.'

All this is reflected in the lives of those who adhere to the 'spirit of unity' today. Even in the buildings and their environs belonging to the Movement there is that simple beauty which helps relationships to be built and restores the integrity of the person: such as in the 'Mariapolis Centres', where congresses and formation courses are held, and the Focolare little towns of which there are 22 in the world. There are many expressions within the Movement of beauty and harmony, such as the products from the Centro Ave and Centro Azur workshops in Loppiano, and the expositions from the "Art'e" group: works of art by painters, musicians, pianists, dancers... each an expression of the ongoing newness of God, source of beauty and harmony.

Chiara Lubich wrote: 'The true artist is a great person. Everyone says it though few are art critics, but everyone admires and is fascinated by 'beauty'. The artist in a certain way

is like the Creator. True artists possess their skill almost unconsciously and use colours, musical notes or stone as easily as we use our legs to walk. Their point of concentration is in the soul, where they contemplate an impression, an idea they wish to express outside of themselves. Hence, within the infinite limits of their human smallness before God, and thus within the infinite difference between two 'created' things (if I may speak like that), artists are in some sense those who recreate, create anew: and a true 'recreation' for some could be provided by the artistic masterpieces produced by others. Unfortunately, for lack of true artists, people find recreation for the most part through empty fantasies in the cinema, drama, shows where art has little place.

'With his or her masterpieces, playthings in comparison to nature, God's masterpiece, the true artist gives us in some way a sense of who God is and makes us discern in nature the Trinitarian traces of the Creator: matter, the law that informs it (what we might call a gospel of nature), life (what we might call a result of the first two. The totality then is something that continuing to 'live' presents an image of the unity of God, of the God of the living. The works of great artists do not die and that is a measure of their greatness, because the artist's idea, expressed in some way perfectly on canvas or in stone, composes something that lives'.

*The full text can be found in: CHIARA LUBICH, Essential Writings, New City London 200, p.306*

## Wisdom and Study

In a letter written by Chiara Lubich in 1940 she wrote a striking passage:

‘Look, I am a person passing through this world. I have seen many beautiful and good things and I have always been attracted only by them. One day (one indefinable day). I saw a light. It seemed to me to be more beautiful than other beautiful things, and I followed it. I realised that it was the Truth.’

Her ambitions at the time, as a recently qualified teacher, were to go to the Catholic University in Milan. Her thinking was: ‘It’s Catholic, they’ll speak about God there, they’ll teach me a lot about God’. There was an entrance test which resulted in funded places for 33 candidates. Chiara came 34th. She felt she had missed a great opportunity. “Between the tears, a voice rang clearly in her troubled heart: ‘I will be your teacher!’”

Her understanding of study lies in the answer Jesus gave.

Later, in 1980, Chiara explains further: ‘Already in ’44 Jesus had asked me to leave my studies behind and put my books in the attic (...) Thirsting for truth, I saw the absurdity of looking for it in the study of philosophy when I could find it in Jesus, the Truth Incarnate. I left my studies to follow Jesus (...) There was, in that episode, a prelude of what would come to be in time the Focolare Movement. We saw a splendid light, but this in our soul, a fruit of our life (..) Following that choice which God asked of me, the light came to us in abundance. It gave light to the spirituality that God wanted from us, it shaped day by day the Movement as it developed. We called this light ‘wisdom’. (...) We understood that wisdom was fundamentally our new way of studying, the studying of the whole Movement (...)

Having left studying behind in '43-'44, by 1950 I felt it was necessary to pick up the books again and study theology. I felt a need to base all the intuitions of that period upon a solid foundation.'

Now the Movement has many places where the culture of unity is developed for example, the 'Abba School', which explores the doctrine that pours out from the 'charism of unity', and is at the source of many initiatives permeating various fields of thought and life; the Marian University which aims to provide basic theological courses for the members of the Movement; various schools and courses based on the specific aims of the Movement; through the publishing house Citta Nuova with numerous publications in many languages, and the cultural magazine Umanita Nuova, and finally in 2008, the Sophia University Institute based in Loppiano (Incisa V. – Florence).

## Unity and Communication

An emblematic aspect of the Focolare Movement is communion, unity. This is the consequence of living the Word and sharing its effects. Chiara wrote: 'There was a time when the Movement didn't exist and then it did. We know what made it be born was the Holy Spirit, which worked in a very precise way. He put the first focolarine in an attitude of being able to take on, in a big way, I would say in a unique manner, the Gospel; He enlightened them through its Words and gave them the push to live them.'

‘What was the effect? We know, unthinkable and marvellous: due to the Word lived radically, the Word taken seriously, a big community was quickly born, and spread rapidly throughout more than one hundred villages in the Trentino region: it was the Focolare Movement. These people used to ignore one another and then became family; Christians, previously indifferent to one another, became connected into one. Therefore the Word of God makes this miracle, can make this miracle: give life to a visible community’.

“Unity” is the word which most distinguishes the Focolare Movement. Unity which is both communion and communication. Unity needs constant communication to keep up to date. The means of communication are also useful for unity. The 38 editions of the magazine ‘Citta Nuova’ which is published in 24 languages, together with other journals such as Gen’s – for those in priesthood, Unita e Carismi – for those in religious life, are helping to reach unity. As are the audiovisual productions made by the ‘Chiara Lubich Centres’.

In 2000 Chiara Lubich addressed an assembly of communicators and offered them 4 ‘principles’ of communication: The first thought: ‘Communication is essential. The effort to live the Gospel in everyday life, the experience of the Word of Life, has always been indissolubly united with communicating it, describing the various steps and the results, since it is a law that we love others as ourselves. We believe that what is not communicated is lost. So life generates light, both for those speak and for those who listen, and it seems the experience is fixed in eternity. They have almost a vocation for communication.

The second thought: 'To communicate, we feel the need "to make ourselves one" as we say, with the one who is listening. So when we speak or address some topic, we do not stop at merely relating the content of our thoughts. First we feel the need to know we have before us, to know the listener or the audience, their needs, desires, problems. Likewise, we make ourselves known as well, explaining why we want to give this talk, what has led us to do it, its effects on ourselves, thereby creating a certain mutuality. In this way the message is received not only intellectually but is also shared in and taken to heart by all.

A third thought: 'Emphasize the positive. It has always been our way to put what is good into light, out of a conviction that it is infinitely more constructive to point out what is good, dwelling on the good and positive aspects, than to stop at the negative, even though whoever is in a position of responsibility has the duty at the proper moment to point out errors, shortcomings and failures.

Finally: the person matters, not the media, which are merely an instrument. Bringing about unity first of all requires the indispensable means, which is the person, St. Paul's new self, who has welcomed the mandate of Christ to be leaven, salt, light of the world.'