

CHIARA LUBICH

These pages contain the texts published on the 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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Who is Chiara?

Chiara, a man in the hands of the Father

When she consecrated her life to God on December 7, 1943, the young teacher, Silvia Lubich never imagined that a few decades later, four popes would speak so highly of her and her spiritual family.

She didn't have any idea what she would see and experience in her 88 years of life here on earth. She didn't have any idea that she would have millions of followers. She never imagine that she and her friends would reach 182 countries.

Could she ever have thought that she would inaugurate a new season of communion in the Church and open channels of ecumenical dialogue that had never been seen before? Much less could she have imagined that her spiritual family would include the faithful of other religions and people without any religious affiliation. Chiara never thought about starting a movement.

On December 7, 1943, Chiara Lubich only had the feelings of a young woman who was in love with her God and was about to enter into a marriage pact that would be sealed with three red carnations. Could she have imagined the crowds of people of all ages, races, and backgrounds who would follow her on her trips around the world and know her only as "Chiara"? Could she ever have imagined in the small city of Trent that her mystical intuitions would one day create a culture of unity for a multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-religious society? Chiara Lubich was a trail-blazer. As a laywoman in the Church she proposed themes and openings that were much later embraced by the Second Vatican Council. In a global society she pointed to universal brotherhood at a time when no one was talking

about encounters among cultures. She honoured life and sought the meaning of suffering. She mapped out a path of religious and civil holiness that could be followed by anyone, not only the privileged few

At the 1977 Eucharistic Congress in Italy she said: “A pen never knows what it will write, a brush never knows what it will paint and a chisel never knows what it will sculpt. When God takes someone into his hands in order to accomplish a new work in his Church, the person doesn’t know what she will do. I think this might be my case: I’m only the tool.”

She added: “There were such abundant fruits and vast spreading which seemed disproportionate to any human effort or planning. There were many crosses, but also many fruits. The human instruments that God uses often have a thing or two in common: They’re generally small and weak. As he moves them around in his hands, the Lord shapes them through countless joys and sorrows. He makes them more and more pliable to the task until they reach a very deep and certain knowledge of themselves and of God. They can say with confidence: I am nothing; God is everything. When this adventure began in Trent, Italy, I didn’t have any plans, I didn’t have anything in mind. The idea of the Movement was in God’s mind and its design came from Heaven.”

The Focolare Movement began with Chiara Lubich who was born on January 22, 1920 in Trent, Italy and died on March 14, 2008 in Rocca di Papa, Italy, surrounded by the love of her people.

The news of her death spread quickly among the members of her spiritual family around the world, who were united in prayer. In the days that followed thousands of people, from plain working men to political and religious leaders, began to arrive in Rocca di Papa to honour her.

The project of God is revealed

Silvia, the baptismal name given to Chiara, was born in Trent on January 22, 1920. She was the second of four children: Gino, Liliana and Carla. Her father, Luigi Lubich, had worked as a wine-seller and typesetter. He was an anti-fascist and socialist who had once been a colleague of Benito Mussolini, but later became an unyielding opponent of the fascist dictator. Her mother, Luigi, possessed a strong traditional faith. After studying medicine her older brother, Gino, joined the Resistance in the famous Garibaldi Brigade. Later, he dedicated himself to journalism at the Communist newspaper, L'Unità.

At the age of 18 Silvia received her teaching certificate with full marks. She wished to continue her studies and applied for admission to a Catholic University but came in last in scholarship lottery. Since there was not enough money in the Lubich family to pay for her education in another city, Silvia was forced to find a job. During the 1940-1941 school year she taught elementary school at the Opera Seraphica in Trent.

The definitive start of her spiritual adventure was her experience at the Marian Shrine of Loreto, Italy, in 1939: "I had been invited to a meeting for Catholic Action students in Loreto," Chiara recounts, "where, according to tradition, the little house of the Holy Family is preserved within the walls of a great fortress-like cathedral. I attended the course with everyone else at the nearby college, but whenever possible I ran to the little house. As I knelt beside a wall blackened by vigil lamps, something new, something divine was enveloping me and nearly crushing me. I contemplated in my mind the virginal life of the three. Each thought pressed down on me and squeezed my heart. I shed uncontrollable tears. During every

break in the conference I felt driven to rush to the little house. Then the last day arrived. The church was filled with young people. A thought came clearly to mind, a thought that was never erased: "I will make you be followed by a host of virgins."

When she returned home from Loreto Chiara went to her students and the parish priest who had been following her so closely. When they saw how radiant and happy she appeared they asked if she had discovered her vocation. Chiara's answer disappointed the priest, because she only told him about the vocations she didn't feel called to: the convent, matrimony and consecration to God in the midst of the world. It was all that she could discern at that moment.

In the years after Loreto – 1939 to 1943 – Silvia continued to work, study and be involved in serving the local Church. When she became a Third Order member she took the name Chiara (Clare).

In 1943, while on her way to fetch some milk at the White Madonna farm, Chiara suddenly felt God's call as she stood frozen in her tracks beneath a railroad overpass: "Give yourself totally to me." She didn't waste any time and immediately asked permission from Capuchin Father Casimiro Bonetti to consecrate herself to God forever. After a long and deep conversation with the priest she finally obtained permission. On December 7, 1943, at six o'clock in the morning she consecrated her to God. Chiara didn't have the slightest intention of founding anything; she was simply "marrying" God and that was everything for her. Only later did this day come to be identified as the symbolic beginning of the Focolare Movement.

During the next few months many young people were drawn to Chiara and a number of them wanted to follow in her footsteps: Natalia Dallapiccola was the first, then Doriana

Zamboni and Giosi Guella, Graziella De Luca and the sisters, Gisella and Ginetta Calliari; another pair of sisters were the Ronchettis, Valeria and Angelella, Bruna Tomasi, Marilen Holzhauser and Aletta Salizzoni. This was all taking place while the little house, the focolare (hearth) was still totally undefined – except for Chiara’s “radical manner of living the Gospel.”

In those months there was war in Trent, bringing misery and death. Chiara and her new companions had the custom of meeting in the same air-raid shelter during air attacks. They wished to be together in living the Gospel after their overwhelming discovery that had led them to place God-Love at the centre of their life. “Every event touched us very deeply,” Chiara would later recount. “The lessons that God was giving to us through the circumstances of war were so clear: Everything passes away. But God seemed to place a question in our hearts: ‘Is there an ideal we could live for that no bomb could destroy, which we could wholeheartedly commit ourselves to?’ Yes, God, and He is Love. We decided to make God-Love our ideal in life.”

One day, taking shelter from the bombs in a darkened cellar beneath the home of Natalia Dallapiccola, they were reading the Gospel. They opened it at random to the prayer of Jesus to the Father on the night before he died: “That all may be one, Father” (Jn 17:21). It is a fascinating text that has been studied by scholars and theologians from through the Christian world. But in those days it was neglected because of its mysterious language. There was that word “unity” which belonged to the Communist vocabulary and had been completely monopolized by them. “But to us those words seemed to illumine, one by one,” Chiara writes, “and they planted a certainty in our hearts that we had been somehow born for that specific page of the Gospel.”

A few months earlier, on January 24th, a priest had asked Chiara: 'When do you think Jesus suffered the most?' Chiara answered: 'When he sweat blood in the Garden of Gethsemene.' But the priest corrected her: 'No, Jesus suffered most when he cried out from the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mt 27:46). As soon as the priest left and she was alone with her friend, Doriana, she said: "We only have one life, let's choose and follow Jesus in this moment of his abandonment." From then on Jesus Forsaken would be Chiara's spouse in life.

Meanwhile, the unrest caused by the war was not letting up. Most of the young women's families fled to the mountain valleys. But their daughters decided to stay in Trent – some because of work or school, and some like Chiara to stay with the people who had gathered around them whom they did not want to abandon. Chiara stayed with an acquaintance until the following September when she found a flat at 2 Piazza Cappuccini on the outskirts of Trent. This is where some of her new friends – Natalia Dallapiccola and others went to live. It was the first hearth (focolare), a modest two-room apartment in the clearing shaded by trees down the hill from the Capuchin church. At that time they called it the "little house" in honour of the house of Loreto.

The young women living in the little house and those outside noted a qualitative change in their lives during those months. It seemed that Jesus was fulfilling his words: "Indeed, where two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). They never wanted to lose him and avoided anything that might cause them to lose his presence among them. This is the 'focolare' whose Fire of Love warms everyone's heart and whose Light satisfies everyone's mind. "But to have him among us," Chiara

explained, “we need to give our lives for each other. Jesus is in our midst when we are united in his love. He said: ‘May they be one in us, so that the world may believe.’”

A large number of people had joined Chiara and the young women of the focolare in the project of unity which was just beginning to take shape. There were numerous conversions, vocations that were saved and new ones that blossomed. Almost immediately, children, teenager and adults had joined together in following the young women in the focolare. What remains most in everyone’s memory from those days is the crowded and intense Saturday-afternoon gatherings at three o’clock in Massaia Hall. There, Chiara would share her experiences of living the Gospel and the first discoveries of what would later become her “spirituality of unity.” By 1945, some 500 people – of all ages, vocations and social backgrounds – shared the same ideal as the young women in the focolare. They put their spiritual and material possessions in common, as the first Christians had done.

The Gospel promises: “Give and there will be gifts for you” (Lk 6:38). These words were translated into daily life. The young women from the focolare and their friends were giving and receiving on a daily basis. Once, there was only one egg in the house. They gave it to a poor man who had knocked at their door. Later that same morning someone left a bag on their doorstep. It was filled with eggs! It is also written: “Ask and it will be given to you” (Mt 7:7). And so they asked, not so much for themselves, but for their needy brothers and sisters. Even in the midst of war they received sacks of flour, cartons of milk, bottles of jam, bundles of firewood and clothing. It was never rare in that focolare to find the table set to welcome not the usual honoured guests, but the often dishonoured poor who sat between focolarine who were there to serve them.

On the feast day of Christ the King, 1945, Chiara and her companions knelt around an altar. They turned to Jesus with the simplicity of children of the Father and prayed: “Jesus, you know how your prayer for unity can be accomplished. Here we are: If you like, use us.” The liturgical readings of that day had grabbed their imagination: “Ask me and I will give you all the lands of the earth for your inheritance” (Ps 2:8). In an evangelical spirit of simplicity they asked for the farthest corners of the earth. They believed that God was all-powerful, and their way of life fascinated anyone who met them.

All this did not go unnoticed by the city with its few thousand residents, nor by the Church of Trent. Archbishop Carlo De Ferrari understood Chiara and her new adventure, and gave his blessing. His blessing and approval accompanied the Movement until the day of his death. From that moment, almost imperceptibly, new frontiers opened in the local region, and there were invitations to Milan, Rome and Sicily.

Christian communities like the one in Trent started springing up everywhere. The movement reached far and wide. In 1956 it spread to Europe. It reached Latin America in 1958 and North America in 1961. In 1963 it arrived in Africa, in Asia in 1966 and Australia in 1967.

Today the Focolare Movement is present in 194 countries and has over 2 million adherents and sympathizers who are mostly Catholic. The faithful of other religions, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and people of non-religious beliefs are also part of the Movement.

Chiara Lubich died on 14 March 2008, at Rocca di Papa, surrounded by her friends. In the days that followed, thousands of people, from ordinary workers to leading figures in the world of politics and religion came to Rocca di Papa to pay their respects to her.

The funeral took place in the Roman basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls which could not contain the huge crowds that gathered (40,000 people). In his message, Pope Benedict XVI described Chiara as a “woman of unwavering faith, a gentle messenger of hope and peace”. The Vatican’s Secretary of State presided over the concelebrated Mass together with 9 cardinals, 40 bishops and hundreds of priests.

The cause for her beatification opened on 27 January 2015. Her words still resound in our hearts: “At the end of time, while waiting in the most compact unity to appear before Jesus Forsaken and Risen, I would like the Work of Mary to be able to say to Him: “On that day, my God, I shall come to you... with my craziest dream: to bring you the world in my arms’. Father, that they may all be one”.

Chiara Lubich: I have a dream

On the threshold of the new millennium the founder of the Focolare Movement spoke about her hope-filled dream for the future. Although we are immersed in the dramatic events that trouble humanity today, we want to make this dream our own.

“Seeing what the Holy Spirit has done with us and with many other spiritual and social “enterprises” that are at work the Church today, I cannot but hope that He will continue to act now and always with the same generosity and magnanimity. And this holds true not only for brand new works that will arise from his love, but also for the development of those that already exist, like our own.

Meanwhile, I dream that the atmosphere in our Church will be more suited to her identity as the Bride of Christ; a Church which can be seen by the world as being more beautiful,

more one, more holy, more charismatic, more akin to Christ her Spouse. I dream of her being a beacon for humanity. And I dream of seeing in her a holiness of the people, never seen before.

I dream that the lived siblinghood, that is gaining momentum today in the consciences of millions of people, will be practised more widely across the globe, so that in the third millennium it will be a general, universal reality.

Consequently, I dream of fewer wars and conflicts, less hunger, and the reduction of the thousand other evils in the world.

I dream of an ever more intense dialogue of love among the Churches so that the formation of the one Church is seen to be close at hand.

I dream of a more living and active dialogue among people of the most varied religions linked to one another by love, by “the Golden Rule” present in all their sacred texts.

I dream of greater encounter and mutual enrichment among the various cultures in the world, so that they may give rise to a world culture that highlights those values which have always been the true wealth of individual peoples, and I dream that these values will be seen by all as global wisdom.

I dream that the Holy Spirit will continue to enrich the Churches and strengthen the “seeds of the Word” beyond them, so that the world may continually receive new light, life, and works which He alone can give. So that ever-greater numbers of men and women may set out towards straight paths, converging on their Creator, and putting their hearts and souls at his disposal.

I dream of Gospel-based relationships not only among individuals, but also among groups, movements, religious and lay associations; among peoples and among States, so that it

becomes logical to love other people's countries as our own; and logical to tend towards a universal communion of goods, at least as a goal to reach.

[..] In a word, I dream of already witnessing the new heavens and new earth, as far as this is possible here on earth. I am dreaming of many things, but we have a millennium to see them come true."

Chiara Lubich

Chiara and the beginnings of the Movement

Not just best friends

Here are some extracts from an article by Florence Gillet for the Roman Observer, dated April 3, 2018. Chiara and her first companions: "A home atmosphere flows among us."

"We'll never be able to quantify the help that we receive from our brothers and sisters. How much courage their faith inspires in us, how much warmth their love, how much their example draws us!" Chiara Lubich (1920-2008), who wrote these words, was known as someone who drew after her hundreds and thousands of people and constructed relationships with Buddhists, Muslims. She is still being followed by people with no religious affiliation and breathing new life into politics and economy.

The friendship with the first companions of Silvia Lubich whom they knew simply as "Chiara" or Clare, played no small role. It all began with a choice of God and her consecration to Him in 1943, Trent, Italy. However, quite soon it was no longer a single "I", but a collective subject that began to move, to act,

to pray and to love: Chiara and her first companions were to become beacons of light in all five continents.

This story has many incredible elements, but yet it's simple. You understand it if you open and read in chapter 13 of John's Gospel: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. As I have loved you, so must you love one another" (13:34). This is a commandment that can only be lived out in the company of others. When Chiara and her companions read this Gospel passage in a bomb shelter, they looked at one another very intensely as they thought about the commitment it would be. They didn't hesitate, but said to each other: "I'm ready to love you to the point of giving my life for you." Chiara would later consider this the cornerstone on which the entire Focolare Movement would rest. It's certainly not something unheard of in the history of the Church, but there might be one thing new about it. Chiara immediately conveyed to her companions whatever she was living and all that the Holy Spirit was inspiring in her. The bond among them was stronger than cement, and I would like to illustrate the quality of their relationship that valued and freed potentials, edifying a work that was of God.

Ten years went by and it was 1954. Chiara was living with Giosi, Graziella, Natalia, Aletta, Marilen, Bruna and Eli. One day, as Chiara paused to look at them, she recalled the sentence from the book of Proverbs: "Wisdom has built her a house and set up her seven columns" (Proverbs 9:1). She was looking at the seven young women in front of her, each with her own talent, all of them united and rooted in God. These were Wisdom's seven columns, the seven colours of the spectrum that emerge from the one light of Love. Seven interdependent aspects of love, each flowing from and into the other.

Chiara entrusted Giosi with the communion of goods and the paychecks, not only the care of the poor: the red of love. To Graziella she entrusted “witness and spreading,” the orange. Natalia had been her first companion: she personified the heart of this ideal, the cry of Jesus Forsaken of love. She would carry thi secret beyond the Iron Curtain. She was the spirituality and prayer life, the yellow of the spectrum. Aletta would be remembered as the one who encouraged the members to be mindful of their health, and to form a community united in love. Chiara entrusted her with the green, Creation and physical life. To Marilen, who lived for fifteen years in the midst of a Cameroon forest, Chiara entrusted the blue: harmony and the home. Bruna was a bit of an intellectual and Chiara saw her as the one who could develop the aspect of studies: the indigo. Eli was always at Chiara’s side and helped to make sure that all the members around the world were living as one. She was entrusted with the aspect of unity and the means of communication, the violet. Some other of her first companions would also have special tasks: Dori, Ginetta, Gis, Valeria, Lia, Silvana and Palmira.

Chiara would explain: “Brotherly love (philadelphia) is more than real among us. This is where I draw strength to face the crosses, besides direct union with Jesus. Here, we each take care of the other, in accordance with the need. Here, we pass from the Wisdom that is shared [...] to the practical advice concerning health, clothing, the house, eating and constant little helps. Here, you know that you’ll never be judged but only loved, forgiven, helped... A home atmosphere flows among us here, which is from Heaven. When I want to verify if my idea is an inspiration, if an article needs to be corrected, I read to someone asking them to be completely empty in judging it. They do it and I feel the voice of Jesus magnified within me:

‘This is good, do this over, explain this better.’ I read the text over with them and we find it just as we desire.” It’s no surprise that Chiara wrote the following words as her testament: “Always be a family.”

1949

In the summer of 1949, the deputy in government Iginio Giordani, who had met the spirit of unity just a few months before, joined Chiara Lubich who had gone for a rest in the Valley of Primiero in Tonadico, in the mountains of Trent, Italy. Together with the small community of Trent, which was now swarming in several other cities of Italy, he had lived with intensity the phrase from the Gospel of Matthew concerning the abandonment of Jesus on the cross.

Chiara would later write about that special summer: “While 1943 marked the beginning of the Movement, 1949 was a giant leap forward. Some unexpected circumstances – but foreseen by Providence – meant that the first little group of us who had begun the Movement should spend some time away from the “world” in the mountains. We had to spend some time away from people, but we couldn’t distance ourselves from our new way of living, which gave meaning to our existence. A tiny and rustic little mountain hut welcomed us into its poverty. We were alone, alone among ourselves, with our great ideal that we lived moment by moment with the Eucharistic Jesus, the Bond of Unity upon whom we drew each day. We were alone to rest, in prayer and meditation. And that is when a moment of particular graces began. We had the impression that the Lord threw open the Kingdom of God that was among us, to the eyes of our soul. It was like the Trinity living in one cell of the Mystical

Body: “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name (...) so that they may be one as we are one” (Jn 17:12). And we were given to understand that the Movement which was being born would be nothing less than a mystical presence of Mary in the Church. Naturally, we would never have left those mountains, little Tabor of our soul, if the will of God had not been otherwise. And it was only because of our love for Jesus Crucified and Forsaken living in humanity, which is so immersed in darkness, who gave us the courage to come down from the mountains.” (Chiara Lubich, in *Scritti Spirituali/3*, Rome 1996, pp 41-42)

On another occasion Chiara said: “A particularly luminous period began in which, among other things, it seemed that God wanted to make understand something about his plan for our Movement.”

In the years that remained, Chiara never did anything but try to realize what had been given to her during that summer of light.

(1) Chiara Lubich, Scritti Spirituali/3, Rome 1996, pp 41-42.

Chiara and the co-founders

Two exemplary figures played key roles along the journey that led Chiara Lubich to understand the design of God on the Focolare Movement and saw the charism of unity found a number of works and realize prophetic intuitions all over the world. One was Pasquale Foresi, a focolarino, priest and theologian. The other was Igino Giordani, a Member of Parliament, writer and journalist, married with four children. They were the first focolarino priest and the first married

focolarino respectively. Chiara soon recognized them as co-founders of the Movement.

Pasquale Foresi

Biography

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 Iginio 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.

Igino Giordani

Chiara Lubich herself called Igino Giordani one of the “co-founders” of the Movement. He was a unique focolarino, familiarly called “Foco” by everyone in the Movement. Although a lover of peace at all costs, he became an officer in the First World War, where he was wounded and received a medal of honour. He was a teacher, an anti-fascist, librarian, husband and father of four children, a known polemicist on the Catholic side, a pioneer of Christian involvement in politics, a writer and a journalist. After the Second World War, living as an anti-fascist and forced into exile, he was elected to the Constituent Assembly of Italy. He was a government deputy, an enlightened layman, a pioneer of ecumenism. Moreover, he was the one to bring the married, lay people and the family into the interior of the focolare, opening it – in a certain sense – to the world.

His meeting with Chiara happened in his office at the House of Representatives, in Montecitorio, in September 1948. He was passing through a difficult moment in his spiritual and political life: “I studied religious topics with a passion,” he writes in his *Memorie di un cristiano ingenuo*, “but also because I didn’t want to look at my soul whose appearance wasn’t very edifying. It was weighed on by boredom and, in order not to admit to the partial paralysis, I plunged myself into study and wore myself out with activity. I believed there was nothing else

to do. To some degree I possessed all the areas of religious culture: apologetics, ascetics, mysticism, dogmatics, and morality... but I possessed them only as a matter of culture. I didn't live them within myself."

That day, in front of his desk, sat a diverse group, appearing strikingly original to a man like Giordani who was an expert in Church life: a Conventual Franciscan together with a Friar Minor, together with a Capuchin, and one Third Order Franciscan, who was Chiara herself. The meeting started cordially. But Giordani later wrote: "seeing them united and agreeing was already a miracle of unity." Chiara spoke, greeted by some polite skepticism of the deputy, "I was sure to hear a sentimental propaganda about some utopian welfare project." But that was not the case at all. "There was an unusual timbre in her voice," Giordani would recall, "the mark of a deep and certain conviction that comes from a life that is supernatural. Suddenly my curiosity was aroused and a fire began to blaze within me. When, after thirty minutes, she had finished speaking, I found myself taken by the enchanted atmosphere: surrounded by a halo of happiness and light; and I would have wanted that voice to continue speaking. It was the voice that I, without realizing, was waiting to hear. It put holiness within the reach of all."

Giordani asked Chiara to put in writing what she had just said, which she quickly did. But personally, Giordani wanted to know more about his new acquaintances. Gradually, he recognized in the focolares, the deep desire of Saint John Chrysostom that the laity might live as the monks but without celibacy. "This desire was so strong within me," he went on to say, "and so I had always loved Franciscan instruction in the midst of the people and the virginal instruction given by Saint Catherine of Sienna to the Dominican Third Order of the

Catherinites. And I went along with initiatives that seemed to lead to the removal of the walls interposed between monastics and laity, between the consecrated and the common people: walls, behind which the Church suffered as Christ in Gethsemane. Something happened in me. It happened that those pieces of culture, which I had always been standing side by side for comparison, began to move and come alive and become a living body, flowing generously with blood: the Blood with which Saint Catherine was burning? Love had penetrated and invested those ideas, and its gravitational pull drew them into an orbit of joy."

And to explain the "discovery" he had made, he would often repeat a phrase which he said to many people during the final years of his life, which spent in a focolare, in Rocca di Papa, following the death of his wife, Mya, whom he loved deeply: "I moved away from the library clogged with books, towards the Church inhabited by Christians."

It was a real and true conversion that "plucking me from the doldrums that walled me in, was urging to place myself in a new landscape that was boundless, somewhere between Heaven and earth, inviting me to walk again."

The cause of canonization is presently underway for Iginio Giordani, called Foco.

Biography

Iginio Giordani is an intellectual who is difficult to label: we cannot describe him as a political thinker or journalist, or studier of ancient Christian literature, or a writer about the lives of saints or history, in the hope of being able to sufficiently express his talents. He was driven by a great passion and was spurred into public life through a wide range of interests. It is said that "for him writing was life", therefore an understanding

of the figure of Giordani could (almost) easily come through analysis of his writings. There are about 100 books and more than 4.000 newspaper articles.

Born 1894 into a poor, profoundly Catholic family in Tivoli, his parents could not guarantee regular schooling and worked in manual labour. But the young Iginio was noted for his intelligence, and a rich gentleman for whom he worked, impressed by his acumen paid for him to study at the seminary, not to become a priest but to be one of the most brilliant diplomats at that time.

As he finished his studies the First World War broke out and he went to the trenches. Giordani refused to fire a single shot against the 'enemy', not wanting to kill "a brother", "in the likeness of God, since all people are made His image", he wrote. Giordani, who always believed in the supreme value of peace, described the war as "an act of madness against God and human reasoning". Blowing up some entangled barbed wire out of pure obedience he was hit by an Austrian sniper and suffered serious injuries as a result of which he spent 3 years in hospital, underwent 11 operations, received a silver medal and had... a close encounter with God. The writings of a lay person, Contardo Ferrini, who was later declared a saint, helped him discover that holiness was possible even in the midst of the world.

He married in 1920. He and his wife Mya had 4 children, and he began working for the newly formed Italian Christian political party, founded by Luigi Sturzo. The Fascist regime destroyed freedom and rights, and even Iginio was persecuted. From this period there remain some of his famous writings denouncing fascist violence. On returning to Italy from a journey to the United States he became the director of part of

the Vatican Library. From there he also directed the journal 'Fides', which was known in Catholic environments throughout the world. It was through them that the re-birth of a post-fascism Catholic political party came about, Christian Democracy. He was elected to Parliament in the first elections after the Second World War.

1948 was the decisive year of his life: he was 54, and a man established in politics and culture. He met Chiara Lubich, a young woman aged 28, in whom he found extraordinary spiritual inspiration.

His encounter with Chiara Lubich took place in his office at the Office of Deputies in Montecitorio, in September 1948. He was going through a particularly difficult moment in his life, both spiritually and politically: "I studied religious topics with a passion," he writes in his *Memorie di un cristiano ingenuo*, "but mostly so that I would not have to think about my soul whose appearance wasn't very edifying. It was burdened with boredom and, in order not to have to admit to its paralysis, I buried myself in books and tired myself with activity. I believed this was all I could do. I had grasped and possessed a bit from all the areas of religious culture: apologetics, ascetics, mysticism, dogmatics and morality . . . but I possessed them only as a matter of culture. They weren't integrated with my life."

That day quite an assorted group appeared at his desk, whose originality immediately struck someone like Giordani who was rather expert on ecclesial life: a Conventual Franciscan, a Friar Minor, a Cappuchin, a man from the Third Order and a woman from the Third Order (Chiara). He would later write: "To see them united in such harmony already appeared like a miracle of unity!" Chiara spoke first, while perceiving the courteous scepticism of the deputy: "I was sure

I would hear a lot of sentimental dribble about some utopian welfare scheme.” But that wasn’t the case at all! “There was an unusual tone in her voice,” he later commented, “a sense of deep certainty and conviction that seemed to come from something supernatural. Suddenly my curiosity was aroused and a fire began to blaze within me. A half hour later when she had finished speaking, I found myself completely taken by an enchanted atmosphere: enclosed in a halo of happiness and light; and I would have wanted that voice to continue speaking. It was the voice that I, without realizing, was waiting to hear. It placed holiness within the reach of everyone.”

Giordani asked Chiara to write down what she had just said, and she quickly did. But personally, Giordani wanted to know more about his new acquaintances. He gradually came to discover in his experience of the Focolare, the deep desire of St John Chrysostom that the laity might live as the monks but without celibacy. “This desire had always been so strong in me,” he went on to say, “and so I had always the Franciscan style of teaching among the people and the virginal instruction given by St Catherine of Siena to the Dominican Third Order. And I supported all the initiatives to bring down the walls placed between the monastic life and the laity, between the consecrated and the common folk: confines within which the Church suffered like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Something happened in me. Those chunks of culture that had always been standing side by side for comparison began to move and come alive, to become a living body that was generously flowing with blood. Love had entered in and invested those ideas, and its gravitational pull drew them into an orbital path of gladness.”

So Giordani adhered fully to the Focolare Movement and at Chiara’s side he took on an important role building the

Movement and deepening its social doctrine, to the point of often being designated by Chiara as co-founder. Of special note, the deep spiritual relationship with Chiara was the start of the intense mystical period known as “Paradise ‘49”. From then Chiara clearly saw through Giordani’s life confirmation that the ideal of unity was made for all, and was a gift for the whole of humanity. Igino was the first married focolarino of the Focolare Movement. He was the one credited with bringing lay married people and families into the Focolare as active members, opening the Movement – in a certain sense – to the entire human family.

Due to some courageous political decisions (pacifism and unity in spite of the ideological differences, or because of them), in Parliament, he became considered as a Christian Democrat out of step, and as a result was not re-elected.

This was the time to dedicate himself more to the Focolare Movement, to contribute to the debate in the Church taking ahead themes that would be understood in the Second Vatican Council (above all concerning the mission of the laity). He became the director of the newly created ‘Citta Nuova’ (1959) magazine, and from 1961 became a director of Centro Uno, a body within the Focolare Movement working within ecumenism. In 1965 he was nominated president of the international institute *Mystici Corporis* in Loppiano. After the death of his wife and with the agreement of his children, he lived the last seven years of his life in a “Focolare”, in Rocca di Papa, near Rome.

Here he would often explain his “discovery” to people with the following words: “I moved away from the library cluttered with books, to the Church filled with Christians.” It was a real and true conversion, a new conversion, which “having plucked me from the doldrums that fenced me in, was

now urging me to step onto a new landscape that was endless, somewhere between earth and Heaven, inviting me to walk again.”

He left this earth on 18th April 1980.

In 1985, Chiara Lubich opened the Iginio Giordani Centre to preserve the papers, correspondence, published works and unpublished writings of Iginio Giordani. Today the Iginio Giordani archives contain several hundred works signed by Giordani, some 4,000 articles and an extensive collection of correspondence with leading political and ecclesiastical figures of the twentieth century.

The process towards his canonisation has begun in 2004.

Chiara Lubich: Iginio Giordani christian and co-founder

First of all, I would like to thank His Excellency Giuseppe Matarrese, Bishop of Frascati, also on behalf of the Focolare Movement, for today’s event: the solemn proclamation of the opening of the cause of beatification of Iginio Giordani. My heartfelt greetings to the fortunate sons, daughter and other relatives of the Honorable Iginio Giordani, now Servant of God. We are grateful for the presence of the mayor of Frascati, Dr. Francesco Posa, and the other mayors, as well as all the citizens whose presence here signals their interest in this Christian, so rich with witnesses to give to the “city of man”. I share the joy of all the members of the Focolare Movement gathered here.

The installation of the ecclesiastical tribunal marks the beginning of the diocesan phase of the canonical proceedings. To each of its members present here I assure my, our prayerful support for your very sensitive work and our active collaboration in any way that could be helpful.

On this very special occasion, I hope that a few words on my part about the Honorable Iginio Giordani will be appreciated.

As you know, he was an eminent, versatile Catholic personality who always joined his political commitment to an intense and fruitful cultural activity as journalist, author, apologist, hagiographer and renowned scholar of the Fathers of the Church and Christian social doctrine. We could and should speak at length about the many different roles which made the Honorable Igino Giordani famous.

But today, in this sacred place and in this particular circumstance, it seems to me that we must speak of him above all as a Christian, as a focolarino and co-founder of the Focolare Movement: roles he diligently carried out for thirty-two years of his life.

Giordani as a Christian

Someone once said that if every Gospel were to disappear from the face of the earth, people should be able to rewrite it by observing how Christians live. On the day of Igino Giordani's funeral, the Gospel passage which speaks of the Beatitudes was read. All of those who had known him well, were unanimous in affirming that he had practiced each one of them. "Blessed are the pure of heart". It was this purity that allowed him to see and describe one's earthly life as a divine adventure, because of the intervention of God's providential love. This purity of heart strengthened his most sacred sentiments and at the same time it potentiated them: towards his wife, towards his most beloved children. He was "poor in spirit", completely detached not only from all that he possessed, but above all, from all that he was. He was full of "mercy": even the most wretched sinner felt that he had been forgiven when he was with him and the poorest person felt like a king. He was always a "peacemaker", as the record of his political career shows. He was so "meek" as to make one understand why the Gospel says that those who

live this virtue will possess the earth. His extraordinary kindness, his way of finding the right word for each person, won over everyone he met. And... we could go on and on....

Giordani as a focolarino

He was an excellent Christian, a scholar, an apologist, and apostle. Yet when he encountered a genuine spring of pure water flowing out from the Church, he “sold everything” in order to follow Jesus who was calling him. Giordani was a true Christian, but he was also a Christian with a specific vocation. God called him to be a focolarino. He personified the name by which he was known within the Movement: “Foco”, which means “fire”. He loved God and neighbour with a love that was both natural and supernatural, the kind of love which is the basis and apex of an authentic Christian life.

He had always hoped to find to fulfil his desire to consecrate himself to God even though he was married. In 1948 he came in contact with the Focolare Movement. And it was through the spirituality of unity, characteristic of this Movement, that he was able to express the Gospel in his life.

So that Christ would live in him, the way to achieve the full communion with our brothers and sisters that Christ asks of us, he really died to himself as a poetic writing of his from 1951 confirms:

“I have resolved to die and what happens no longer matters to me; now I wish to disappear in the abandoned heart of Jesus.

All this toiling with avarice and for vanity disappears in love: I have recovered my freedom.

I have resolved to die by this death which dies no more; now I wish to enjoy with God his eternal youth.”

Giordani was very familiar with Christian asceticism, and he also experienced the joys of contemplation and the mystical life. St. Louis Maria Grignon di Montfort, speaking of people whom the Virgin Mary loves in a special way, says that the primary gift that such persons acquire here on earth, is the life of Mary in the soul, so that it is no longer that person who lives but Mary living in him or her. In other words, such persons acquire the hearth and soul of Mary.

Giordani wrote in 1957: “On the evening of October 1st, the month dedicated to Mary, after praying, I felt my soul suddenly free from every attachment to persons and things. Mary entered in their place, with the lifeless Jesus in her arms. My entire soul was filled with her presence, a combination of suffering and love. (...) “She remained there for twenty-four hours, like an altar bearing its victim: ‘Virgo altare Christi’. My soul became her room, a temple. (...) So that I felt like saying: ‘It is no longer I who live, but Mary who lives in me’. “Her presence had, as it were, virginized my soul, marianized my person. My ego seemed dead, and Mary took its place. I no longer felt the need to search for images of Mary along the road. It was enough to fix the eyes of my soul within to discern, in the place of the usual sordid and grotesque idol of myself, the All Beautiful One, the Mother of the Fair Love. And even this poor, suffering body seemed to me to be a kind of cathedral.... “If I am not the most scoundrel on earth, I must become a saint, in order to be in accord with this reality.”

Giordani co-founder

He was also co-founder of the Focolare Movement. He was the one who opened the doors of the focolare to married people. In this way, something which had at first been only vaguely foreseen, became a reality – single and married people

could, insofar as is possible, pursue the same spiritual itinerary. He was the one who gave an outstanding contribution to the birth of those branches of the Focolare's mass movements, like the New Families Movement, the Youth for a United World, or the New Humanity Movement, which seeks to animate the worlds of work, art, medicine, education, and politics, to name a few, with a genuine Christian spirit. He was the one who began with other members of parliament the "St. Catherine Center", precisely in order to animate politics with the spirit of the Movement. He was the one who personified one of the most important aims of this Movement: to cooperate towards the unification of the Churches, directing for years the ecumenical center "Centro Uno".

He was the one, above all, who helped the Movement to be deeply rooted in the Church. During his lifetime, the Movement's branches extended across the globe bearing much fruit, given its evangelical spirit which emphasizes universal fraternity, unity among all people.

Giordani was one of the greatest gifts that heaven ever gave our Movement.

And now, to conclude, I would like to tell you about one of his last days. His physical condition had deteriorated. I brought to his bedside a card that had just arrived for him, with a picture of the Holy Father, a heartfelt blessing, and His signature. It made him very happy. He brightened and said: "Today is a beautiful feast day! This is something I never expected!" And while Father Antonio Petrilli – one of the first focolarini priests, who was looking after him during his last years, he too in heaven now – was hanging up the framed blessing on the wall, Giordani added: "I feel like I'm in heaven". When I asked if it would like him to have Mass said in his room,

also so that together we could renew the pact of unity of the focolarino, he exclaimed: “Oh, how beautiful! This is an added gift.” At one point, he said: “I’m always mindful of God, the Giver”, and he listed some of the gifts he had received from God. When I asked him if he would like to go to heaven, he nodded with his head, as if to say: “Oh, if only I could...!” Several times, with a particular smile, he added: “This is heaven! What could be more beautiful?” Referring once again to the Pope’s blessing, he whispered: “I can’t find the words to express what that gift means to me; the more I think about it, the more I find no words ...” After receiving the Eucharist during a special Mass, he solemnly affirmed: “Everything is complete”. Giordani is present here today with all of us.

By Chiara Lubich

Igino Giordani: The encounter that made him a new person

The following is recorded in the personal diary of Igino Giordani: “17 September 1948. This morning at Montecitorio I was called upon by angels: a Capuchin, a Friar Minor, a Conventual, a Third Order man and a Third Order woman, Silvia Lubig (sic!), who is beginning a community in Trent. She spoke like a saint inspired by the Holy Spirit.”

Recounting the event: “One day I was urged to listen to an apostle – as they said – of unity. It was in September 1948. I exhibited the usual courtesy of any deputy towards possible electors when some Religious came to Montecitorio, representatives of different branches of the Franciscan family, a young lay woman and a young layman. To see a Conventual, a Friar Minor, a Capuchin, and a woman and man from the Third Order of Saint Francis all united together already looked like a miracle of unity to me: and I said so.

The young lady spoke: I was sure I'd hear a sentimental propagandist tell me about some utopian welfare. Instead, right from the first words I felt something new. A half hour later when she had finished talking, I was taken by the enchanting atmosphere: I would have liked that voice to continue on. Without realizing it, it was the voice that I had been waiting for. She placed holiness within everyone's reach; she took away the grates that separated the lay world from the mystical life. She made public the treasures of a castle that only a few were admitted to. She brought God near: she made him feel like a Father, brother, friend, present to humankind.

I wanted to look into it: and getting familiar with the life of the Focolare of unity – as they called it – I recognized in their experience the realization of the desire that overwhelmed Saint John Chrysostom: that the laity would live as monks, minus celibacy. I had much cultivated that desire.

What happened was that the idea of God had yielded its place to God's love, the ideal image of the living God. In Chiara I had found someone who didn't talk about God, but someone who spoke with God: a daughter speaking in loving conversation with the Father.

If I did a critical examination of it, I found that I hadn't discovered anything new. In the way of life that was opening to my soul, I found all the same names, characters and doctrines that I had loved. All my study, my ideals, the very events of my life all seemed directed to this goal. Nothing new: yet everything was new: the elements of my cultural and spiritual formation began to come together in accordance with God's plan. They took their rightful place.

All was old and all was new. The key that unlocked the mystery had been discovered: love was allowed to pass, which

had too often been barricaded: and it burst forth spreading like fire and becoming a blaze.

A collective, socialized holiness – to use terms that were later popularized by the Second Vatican Council – drawn out of the individualism that had accustomed everyone to become holy on one's own, meticulously caring for one's own soul, with endless analyses in order not to lose that soul. A piety, an interior life that came from Religious houses, from a certain exclusiveness of the privileged classes was now poured out into the public, into offices and factories, into houses and fields – and into convents – because wherever you find people, you find candidates for the perfection of holiness.

And to live this new life, to be born in God, I didn't have to renounce my doctrines: I only had to place them in the fire of love so that they would come alive. Through my neighbour I began to live God. Life became a total adventure, consciously lived in union with the Creator, which is what life is. Mary was resplendent with a new beauty; the saints entered among the relatives; Heaven became a common home. This was the discovery, this the experience. This made me a new man."

A "socialised" sanctity

On January 27, 2015 the cause of canonization of Chiara Lubich opened. Iginio Giordani, in these unpublished writings dated 1974, testifies to the strong impact that had on him the meeting with Chiara and her charisma, which took place in September 1948: from this meeting took shape in him a totally new idea of holiness:

«In reading about the lives of the saints, the idea of sanctity that seemed like a difficult uphill climb reserved only for a rare group of people, became a common heritage, and I began to understand why Jesus invited all his disciples to reach

perfection, in the same way as the Father: the perfection of God himself!

It all seemed old but also totally new. It was a new method, a new spirit, like discovering the key to a mystery: one that opened out to love that had been locked up, but which now broke out like a flame and spread until it became a blazing fire.

The ascent towards that remote God now seemed easy and possible for all, since all could now find the way home together, as brothers. Those terrifying acts of penance (hair shirts, chains, dark nights of the soul, renunciation) became effortless since all was done together, with the help of our brothers, with love for Christ.

It was the dawning of a “socialised” sanctity (terms used by the Second Vatican Council and which would become popular) no longer individualistic, where you think of sanctifying yourself and meticulously cultivate your own soul, instead of forgetting yourself. A religiosity, an interior life that issued from the ranks of religious institutes, from a sort of elitism of the privileged classes –at times so distant and even against society, in reality formed by the major part of the living Church. This sanctity now reaches out to the squares, workshops and offices, the houses and fields, as also to the convents and Catholic Action associations, since in every place, one meets people who are all candidates for perfection. In short, asceticism has turned out to be a universal adventure of divine love – love that generates light.»

«Life is a unique occasion to be lived on earth which is one with eternity. And we can make the earth a foretaste of heaven, and insert it into the life of God, to bring heaven on earth. Do not spoil it with ambition and greed and do not ruin it with wrath and hostility: deify it – extend it within the heart of the Eternal – with Love. And God is where love exists. And where

every moment is used for love, giving God to others: which also means absorbing God for oneself and for the others.

This means experiencing the freedom of the sons of God, for whom the spirit is not immobilized by prejudice, divisions, oppositions, and barricades to the spirit of God. Those who live this way do not focus on sanctifying themselves but on sanctifying. They are not self-centered. They sanctify by sanctifying, given that we love through loving, and serve by serving. In this way, sanctification itself takes on a social dimension: a continual giving and giving of oneself brings about the sanctification of souls, which becomes a communitarian reality.

"Be perfect as my Father is perfect," Jesus exhorted: and we become perfect in God's will, united as one in order to be one with Him, through Christ».

The age of maturity

Awaiting approval

In the late 1940's, almost imperceptibly, the spirit of the Movement began to spread beyond the borders of Trent, northern Italy. In the space of a few months in that first city about 500 people had begun striving to live the Gospel in the spirit of the early Christians. Now, the focolarini were invited to Milan, Rome, Florence, Sicily and elsewhere and, quietly, Christian communities like the one in Trent began to develop.

But precisely during those years of extraordinary growth, the Church began a careful study of the Movement. It was a long period of intense examination, of suspension and doubts.

The 50's and early 60's were years lived in uncertainty of ever receiving approval, which seemed to never arrive.

The nascent spirituality, which was rooted in Scripture, highlighted words that were not often heard before the Second Vatican Council, words like: "unity," "Jesus in the midst" of the community, "Jesus Forsaken," etc. Moreover the first focolarine were young and they were lay people who were trying to live the words of the Gospel, not only to read and meditate on them. This appeared "protestant". And their practice of the communion of goods in order to offer an orderly and organized assistance to the poor appeared "Communist." But for them it meant living like the first Christians and they felt a particular affinity with the Church in the years before it was divided.

Thus, in the 40's and 50's, without knowing it, the Focolare was becoming interwoven with invisible threads with the main currents of thought that were spreading through the Christian world and later taken up by the Second Vatican Council. The attention they paid to the Gospel was in perfect agreement with the biblical movement; their desire to live for unity bound the focolarini to the ecumenical movement (from 1960). Then they were prepared, when religious and social conditions arrived which required it, to embrace dialogue with the followers of different religions and with people with no religious reference. Moreover, having been started by a laywoman, for laypeople, placed the Focolare in perfect harmony with the emergence of the laity in the Church.

This new passion for unity would be fully recognised and welcomed into the heart of the Catholic Church on the eve of the Council in 1962, when it approved the central nucleus of the Focolare Movement.

The Movement received its first provisional approval. The Movement was also recognised by Pope John XXIII under the name “Work of Mary” given by Chiara Lubich. There were further investigations by the Holy See and further recognition granted following other developments in the Movement and modifications to the General Statutes. The Statutes were finally approved in June 1990.

The Pontifical Council for the Laity’s decree of approval stated: “Faithful to its Charism, the Movement has developed, spread and grown in maturity. It has brought the Church abundant spiritual fruit and is a credible witness of unity in the world”.

The Focolare Movement is for everyone. Indeed, it brings together Christians from various Churches, the faithful of different religions as well as those who do not profess a formal faith.

Openness

For those who belong to the Focolare Movement dialogue is not a matter of opinion. Even a glance at the stages in its development (see timeline) will show that the Movement was not born sitting around a planning table, but by an inspiration through the charism that the Holy Spirit wished to bestow on a young woman from Trent (Northern Italy). Since the earliest years numerous incidents occurring with Chiara Lubich and her first companions pointed out a way of total acceptance of others no matter who they were. And acceptance is the first step in dialogue.

Looking then at the spreading of the Movement in the world, it will appear clear that the rapid growth of the spirit of

unity cannot be attributed only to words that were spoken between a few people, into a microphone, or on the radio to reach new frontiers, but to love that is lived out according to the art of loving that Chiara had always proposed as the one and only “method” for spreading – “making yourself one”. It is a phrase borrowed from Saint Paul (“I have become all things to all people”) and, for the Movement, this has always been the only “method” used in spreading, the principal method of evangelization.

Considering the vast spreading of the Movement, it is obvious that the spirituality of unity conquered the hearts and the souls of persons of every social category because of its uncompromising openness to humankind and its needs. An openness expressed primarily in an attitude of dialogue in every field, time and place.

Therefore, in the Focolare dialogue is to be understood in its strongest sense, in its Gospel sense, in which we do not sacrifice our own identity in order to reach compromises of any sort, but precisely because of the identity we have, we are able to reach out to another who is “different from us” in a spirit of openness.

On 24 January 2002 when she and Andrea Riccardi were called to Assisi to speak on behalf of the Catholic Church before the pope and other religious leaders of the world, following the collapse of the Twin Towers, Chi-ara wished to underscore that the Church’s attitude is “all dialogue”. She recalled the Church’s four dialogues: the one within the Church itself, the ecumenical dialogue, the relationship with the faithful of other religions and the dialogue with people who do not profess any religious creed. These are precisely the four dialogues that the Church identified during Vatican II, in Paul VI’s encyclical *Ecclesium*

Suam, as ways of being in relationship with the world in all its various facets.

In 1991 Chiara wrote: “Jesus considers as allies and friends all those who battle against evil and work, often without realizing it, for the coming of God’s Reign. Jesus asks a love from us that is able to become dialogue; that is, a love, that far from closing us proudly within the precincts of our own little worlds, is able to open itself to everyone, and to work together with other people of good will for the building of peace and unity in our world. Therefore, let us try to open our eyes to the neighbours that we meet, to admire the good they do, no matter what their beliefs may be, to feel solidarity with them and to encourage each other on the path of justice and of love.”

Recognitions

Since 1995 there has been a growing number of recognitions awarded to Chiara Lubich on behalf of international organizations, universities and public offices. These motivations highlight in a particular way the contribution towards peace and unity among peoples, religions and cultures. In Chiara Lubich’s addresses on such public ceremonies, she presents in different ways a careful study of the various aspects of the charism entrusted to her by the Holy Spirit, thus attributing the fruit of unity and peace that are thereby recognized.

International Organisations

UNESCO – Unesco Prize for Peace Education 1996 (Paris 1996)

EUROPEAN COUNCIL – Human Rights Prize 1998 (Strasbourg 1998)

Government leaders

Brazil – Southern Cross award from the President of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Rome 1998)

Federal Republic of Germany – The Great Cross of Merit from the President of Germany Johannes Rau (Rome 2000)

Italian Republic – Knights of the Great Cross from the President of Italy Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (Rome 2003)

Ecumenism

From the Anglican Church – Cross of the Order of St. Augustine of Canterbury from the Anglican Primates Archbishop Robert Runcie (London 1981) and Archbishop George Carey (London 1996)

From the Orthodox Church: The Byzantine Cross from Patriarch Dimitrios I (Istanbul 1984) and Bartholomew I (Istanbul 1995)

From the City of Augsburg (Germany) – Augustan Peace Prize (between Lutherans and Catholics) (Augsburg 1988)

Interreligious dialogue

Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion (London, 1977)

From the Jewish Community of Rome -An Olive Tree for Peace (Rocca di Papa 1995)

From Hindu Movements of Gandhian inspiration Shanti Ashram and Sarvodaya: Defender of Peace Prize (Coimbatore India 2001)

Honorary doctoral Degrees

Poland – Social Sciences from the Catholic University of Lublin (1996)

Thailand – Social Communications from St. John’s University in Bangkok (1997)

Philippines – Theology from the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas in Manila (1997)

Taiwan – Theology from Fu Jen University of Taipei (1997)

USA – Humane Letters from Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut (1997)

Mexico – Philosophy from the University of San Juan Bautista de la Salle, Mexico City (1997)

Argentina – Jointly, all 13 Academic Faculties of the State University of Buenos Aires (1998)

Brazil – Humanities and the Science of Religion from the Catholic University of Sao Paolo (1998)

Brazil – Economics from the Catholic University of Pernambuco (1998)

Italy – Economics from the Catholic University of Milan in Piacenza (1999)

Malta – Psychology from the University of Malta (1999)

USA – Education from The Catholic University of America
(Washington D.C. 2000)

Slovakia – Theology from the University of Trnava (2003)

Italy – Theology of Consecrated Life from Claretianum Institute
of the Lateran Pontifical University, (Rome 2004)

Honorary citizenships

Palermo – 1998

Buenos Aires (Argentina) – 1998

Rome – 2000

Florence – 2000

Genoa (Italy) – 2001

Turin – 2002

Milan – 2004

La Spezia – 2006

Rocca di Papa (Rome) – 1995

Pompei (Naples) – 1996

Tagaytay (Philippines) – 1997

Rimini (Bologna – Italy)- 1997

Chacabuco (Argentina) – 1998

Incisa Valdarno (Italy) – 2000

Rovigo (Italy) – 2000

Bra (Cuneo – Italy) – 2002

Todi (Perugia – Italy) – 2005

La Spezia (Italy) – 2006

Awards from civic administrations

Peace and solidarity Prize – Regione Liguria (Italy) – 2001

Camune Rose Prize – Regione Lombardia – 2003

Ardent Eagle of St. Wenceslas – Trent (Italy) – 1995

Turrita d'argento – Bologna (Italy) – 1997

Brazao Medal d'Armas de Belem – Belém (Brazil) – 1998

Grosso d'oro – Brescia (Italy) – 1999

City of Alba Prize – Alba, Italy – 2000

City of Castelgandolfo, City of Peace Prize – Castelgandolfo (Italy) – 2003

S.M. Capua Vetere City of Peace Prize – S.M. Capua Vetere (CE, Italy) – 2003

Civis Tusculanus – Frascati (Rome) – September 2004

Honors from local churches

Trent (Italy) – The Gold Medal of San Vigilio – January 1995

Slovenia – The Saints Cyril and Methodius Medal from the Slovenian Church – April 1999

Brescia (Italy) – Goodheartedness Price Paul VI – September 2005

Cultural boards

Medal of Honor – State University of San Paolo (Brazil 1998)

The St. Catherine Silver Plaque – St. Catherine Center of Siena (1987)

Casentino Prize – Michelangelo Cultural Center – City of Florence, in Arts and Letters (Arezzo 1987)

First International Prize for Dialogue among Peoples – Franciscan International Study Center (Massa Carrara 1993)

UELCI Prize: Author of the year 1995 – Union of Italian Catholic Editors (Milan 1995)

Civilization of Love Prize for interreligious dialogue – International Forum, Civilization of Love (Rieti 1996)

International Telamone Prize for Peace 1999 – Socialprogramming Center (Agrigento 1999)

Friendly Heart Prize 1999 – (Brescia 1999)

Trentino of the Year Award – (Trent 2001)

6th Rotary Club Award – (Trent 2001)

Stefano Borgia Prize for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue – International Center for Borgia Studies – (Velletri 2001)

Lifetime Achievement Award – Family Theater Productions (FTP) di Hollywood (Montet, Svizzera, 16 July 2006)

Thomas Moro Award – Catholic University of Paraguay (Asunción, 27 December 2006)

Developing the Work of Mary

The adventure of unity came from a charism of the Spirit in the person of Chiara Lubich. At least 5 Popes have confirmed this as well as innumerable personalities from across the spectrum of Christianity. This ‘gift’ appeared very quickly, almost immediately, as eminently collective and communitarian. Even before she had made her consecration to God, Chiara Lubich, then a young teacher, met in July 1943 the person who was to become her first companion in the Focolare in Piazza Cappuccini, Natalia Dallapiccola. It was to Natalia that Chiara had said ‘You must get to know God; He is not only goodness, patience and mercy, but also beauty, love, light for every mind.’ Chiara shared straight away with Doriana Zamboni, known to everyone as Dori, that she had made her consecration to God on 7th December 1943. Chiara gave Dori lessons in philosophy and in October that year had said to Dori, ‘We want to make a new house. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen a cloister with lots of columns. We want to make a cloister where the columns are people living and in the middle there is a garden with a spring of fresh water: Jesus.’

In the early days when the Movement was a group of young men and women around Chiara, there were among them a few who were particularly linked to her. They were clear in their conviction that the charism had been given personally to Chiara. These people, each with strong personalities, were a mix of well educated, some less so, professionals and skilled workers such as an electrician, brought to all that they did the indelible mark of unity: each one of them in fact, through meeting the charism of unity radically changed their lives, putting them at the service of the charism.

In one of that closer group, Giosi Guella, Chiara recognised *'incarnate'* all that was involved in the charism to do with *'inside'*, the life *'in the home'*, trusted to keep the *'flame'* of love alive among them. In Graziella De Luca, a fervent dynamic young girl, Chiara felt there was, in some way, all that the charism turned to the *'outside'*, the spreading onto the world of the light that had been received. Between those two, there was Natalia Dallapiccola, who in the light of Chiara appeared with her in some way that summarised these two *'dimensions'*: *'In her the external and internal are united'*, Chiara wrote in October 1950. Chiara in some way often clearly, *'saw'* or *'recognised'* the different aspects of her charism. She saw them in the human attitudes of each person, but *'clarified'*, purified, raised up in the Spirit. Each one of her first companions in a way became a segment of the complex design of the Opera (Work of Mary) that would be born.

Some of these people have already left this world, whilst others continue their work, faithful to the end of all their energy. In an extraordinary way, they are a complete body, indissolubly united to the founder and give witness to the "collective holiness", which is an integral part of the charism of unity.

Chiara Lubich 's Final years

Following a period of illness and retreat in Switzerland in the early 1990's, Chiara Lubich engaged the Focolare in a rapid opening to local society and to faraway peoples. Certainty that the Movement was fully inserted in the Church spurred an extraordinary season of dialogue, journeys and public recognitions. A number of honorary degrees, citizenships and prizes on every continent (see timeline) showed how her Ideal and its influence had reached a high point.

The period between 1994-2004 saw the start and consolidation of deeper and expanded dialogue with faithful of the Great Religions especially in the East; a large series of activities promoted by the Movement that advanced the contribution of the charism of unity in the fields economics, politics, communication, health, and more; the launching of a large scale effort engaging politics and ecumenism in giving a "soul" to Europe.

Following this long period of journeys, foundations and new frontiers, Chiara's health began to fail. The last three years of her life on earth were perhaps the most difficult. Jesus Forsaken, her Spouse, presented himself to her "in a solemn way", in a darkness where it seemed that God was "like the sun when it sets and is lost beyond the horizon". Nonetheless, moment by moment Chiara continued to love person after person, one person at a time. She continued to place herself at the service of God's design on the Movement, overseeing its development until the very last days of her life when, to her great joy, Sophia University was instated as a Pontifical University Institute.

She still had one constant last wish: “I would wish that the Work of Mary, at the end of time, when all united and waiting to appear before Jesus Forsaken and Risen, may be able to say to him, in the moving words of the Belgian theologian Jacques Leclercq: ‘On your day, my God, I shall come to you... I shall come to you, my God ... with my wildest dream come true: to bring you the world in my arms.’ That all may be one!”

Chiara died on 14th March 2008 shortly after 2 a.m. She had spent her final month in Gemelli Hospital, in Rome. From there she still managed brief correspondence and decisions for the Movement. She also received a letter from the Pope which she re-read often because it gave her great comfort. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I visited her in hospital and gave her his blessing.

During the final days she more than once expressed a desire to return home. Once there, she said goodbye to her first companions and close collaborators. Then, as her condition worsened and she began to fade away, an endless line of people passed by her bedside, to see her, kiss her hand, to say thank you. The emotion was intense, but so were the faith and love. The Magnificat was intoned in thanksgiving for the great things the Lord had done in Chiara, and as a renewed pledge to live the Gospel, to love in the way Chiara had always taught and done.

Time Line

1920 22 JANUARY – Born in Trent, Italy. Baptized with the name of Silvia. Her parents are typesetters: her mother is a fervent Christian, her father a Socialist. Her brother, Gino, will be a partisan and then a reporter for the Italian Communist newspaper L'Unità.

1938 – Teaches in Castello and in Livo in Val di Sole, and then in Trent. Enrolls at the University of Venice where she begins to study Philosophy. The Second World War prevents her from continuing her studies.

1939 – While attending a course for Catholic Action youths, she visits the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto and discovers her vocation, a “fourth way”, a new vocation in the Church.

1943 – Called upon to animate a Franciscan Third Order group, she is attracted by Clare of Assisi’s radical choice of God and takes her name.

1943 7 DECEMBER – Consecrates her life to God with a perpetual vow of chastity. This day is considered the birth of the Focolare Movement.

1944 13 MAY – Trent undergoes a violent bombing. Chiara’s family home is partially damaged and the family has to flee the city. Chiara stays behind in the city to continue supporting what was being born around her. Later she will find an apartment in Piazza Cappuccini, which she will share with her first companions. It is the first “focolare”.

1947 – First diocesan approval of the Movement by Carlo De Ferrari, Archbishop of Trent, who had stated: “The finger of God is in this”.

1948 – First men’s focolare is opened in Trent. In Montecitorio, Rome, Chiara meets the Honorable Igino Giordani, father of four children, Member of Parliament, writer, journalist, and pioneer of ecumenism. Chiara will consider him a co-founder of the Movement because of his definitive contribution in the field of incarnating the spirituality unity in society and in the ecumenical developments of the Movement.

1949-1959 – Beginning in 1949, Chiara will spend her summers in the Trentino Dolomites with her first companions. They will be joined by a growing number of people, giving a picture of society founded on the Gospel. This is the first city of Mary, the Mariapolis. In 1959 more than 10,000 persons will gather in Fiera di Primiero, from 27 countries.

1953 –The way is officially opened for the “married focolarini” who are consecrated to God according to their state in life, being allowed to enter and belong to focolares.

1954 – Chiara founds the Diocesan Priests Branch and also that of Consecrated Religious who belong to the Movement. Pasquale Foresi is the first focolarino to be ordained a priest by the Archbishop of Trent. Chiara will also consider Foresi as a co-founder of the Movement because of his role in developing the Movement: for instance, in furthering theological studies, in drawing up the statutes, in setting up the first publishing house, and in establishing Loppiano, the first of the Movement’s little towns.

1956 – The first Citta Nuova magazine is published. The Volunteers are born, persons committed to renewing the most diverse areas of society.

1959 – The first collections of Chiara’s spiritual writings is published, with the title: Meditazioni. Thus beginning her publishing activity l’Editrice Città Nuova (New City Publishing).

The Focolare begins its spreading beyond the Iron Curtain, in Eastern Europe.

1961 – In Darmstadt, Germany, Chiara meets with Lutheran pastors who wish to know about her Gospel spirituality. This is the beginning of ecumenism in the Movement.

1962 – First pontifical approval ad experimentum: John XXIII recognizes the Movement, under the name Work of Mary.

1963 – Near Rome, in Rocca di Papa, the first “Mariapolis Centre” is inaugurated with the purpose of offering formation courses for members of the Movement.

1964 – The first Focolare town is begun at Loppiano, in Incisa Val d’Arno, near Florence.

1966 – She founds the Gen Movement (New Generation), youth branch of the Focolare. At London Chiara is received in audience by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Doctor Michael Ramsey, Primate of the Anglican Communion, who encourages the spreading of the spirituality of the Focolare in the Church of England.

In Fontem (The Republic of Cameroon), she lays the foundation stone of a hospital offering assistance to the Bangwa Tribe, in one of the Focolare’s little towns, which bears witness to the collaboration between the local population and the Focolare. Chiara founds the Parish Movement in response to encouragement from Paul VI to bring the spirit of unity into parishes and into diocese.

1968 – She founds the Gens Branch for Gen seminarians. Chiara Lubich realizes that the social realizations in the fields of society share a vital interconnectedness and she forms them into one movement to which she gives the name, “New Humanity” and she entrusts it to the men and women Volunteers to animate it.

1967 – At Istanbul Chiara meets the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I. This will be the first of 24 audiences. She founds the New Families Movement.

1970 – Chiara founds the Gen 3 Movement for boys and girls, the Focolare’s third generation.

1971 – She begins the movement for religious adherents of the Focolare Movement. During an audience, Pope Paul VI gives his blessing.

1975 – For the Holy Year, 25 thousand youths gather for the Genfest in Rome, Italy.

1976 – The first international annual meeting of “Bishops Friends of the Focolare Movement” is inaugurated. These are promoted by Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, Bishop of Aachen, Germany, with the goal of providing an opportunity to enter more deeply into the spirituality of unity and experience “effective and affective” collegiality. Bishop Hemmerle will come to be considered a co-founder of the Movement.

1977 – At Guildhall in London, Chiara receives the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, in the presence of representatives from many faiths. This marks the beginning of the Movement’s dialogue with the faithful of other religions.

1980 – At Flaminio Stadium in Rome, 40 thousand youths gather for their Genfest. It is the Movement’s largest public gathering ever.

1981 – At Tokyo, Japan, invited by the Reverend Nikkyo Niwano, founder of the Buddhist lay movement, Rissho Koseikai, she speaks about her Christian experience in their great temple to 10 thousand people. This is the beginning of a fruitful relationship of dialogue and collaboration in the field of humanitarian action in favour of peace.

1982 – First international meeting of “Bishops Friends of the Focolare Movement” with bishops from different Churches and ecclesial communities, at the request of John Paul II.

1983 – First international congress of the New Humanity Movement at the Palaeur Sport Stadium in Rome, Italy, with more than 15 thousand people in attendance from five continents.

1984 – Chiara founds the Gen 4 Movement for young children. John Paul II visits the international Centre of the Movement in Rocca di Papa, Italy. And she gives the go-ahead to the Young for Unity Movement.

1985 – Chiara is named a consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

Joins the extraordinary synod for the twentieth anniversary of Vatican II. Genfest 1985 in Rome, Italy, marks the beginning of the Youth for a United World Movement, with the Gen as its main animators.

1988 – She is awarded the prize for the Pax Augustana by the city of Augsburg, Germany.

1990 – Il Pontificio consiglio per i laici approva gli statuti generali aggiornati del Movimento dei Focolari.

With the help of Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, Chiara inaugurates the Abba School (center for interdisciplinary studies), whose task is to explore the doctrinal dimensions of the charism of unity.

1991 – In Brazil, at Mariapolis Araceli, near to San Paulo, Chiara begins the Economy of Communion project.

1993 – Through simultaneous broadcasts to 63 national t.v. stations and many local ones, the Familyfest, which is held at the Palaeur Sport Stadium in Rome, is viewed by some 500 million spectators around the world.

1994 – She is named honorary president of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).

1996 – With a group of politicians, adherents of the Focolare, she starts the Political Movement for Unity. She receives an honorary doctorate in Social Sciences from the University of Lublino, in Poland. Another eleven honorary doctorates will follow: Theology (Philippines and Taiwan, 1997, Slovakia, 2003, England, 2008); Social Communications (Thailand, 1997); Human Sciences (USA, 1997); Philosophy (Mexico, 1997); Interdisciplinary Studies (Argentina, 1998); Religious Sciences (Brazil, 1998); Economy (Brazil, 1998 and Italy, 1999); Psychology (Malta, 1999); Pedagogy (USA, 2000).

In Paris, she is awarded the Unesco Prize for Education and Peace.

1997 – At Bangkok, Thailand, she meets the Supreme Patriarch of Thai Buddhism, His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, who encourages the dialogue and cooperation between Buddhists and the Movement. At Chiang Mai, Thailand, she speaks to a large group of Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay people, sharing her spiritual experience with them. In Manila, Philippines, she presents the Focolare Movement to the General Assembly of the Bishop's Philippine Bishops Conference. Following this, she will also speak at the Bishop Conferences of Taiwan, Switzerland, Argentina, Brazil, Croatia, Poland, India, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Austria.

At the United Nations Building in New York City, she speaks about the Unity of Peoples, during a symposium organized in her honour by the WCRP.

She offers her testimony to three thousand Black American Muslims of the American Muslim Society in the Malcolm X Mosque, in Harlem, New York. She has been invited by the Imam W. D. Mohammed, who is its founder.

At Graz, in Austria, she proposes the spirituality of unity as an “ecumenical spirituality” at the opening of the second European ecumenical assembly promoted by the Council of European Bishops Conferences (CCEE) and by the Council of the Christian Churches of Europe (KEK) which groups together Orthodox Churches and Churches of the Reform.

1998 – She meets the Jewish community in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina.

The President of Brazil confers on her “The Cruzeiro do Sul” (Southern Cross) for her efforts on behalf of the most disadvantaged and for promoting the Economy of Communion.

In Rome, at Saint Peter’s Square, before more than 350, 000 participants, she is one of four founders who speak at the first international meeting Ecclesial Movements and New Communities. Pope John Paul II entrusts to her the development of a path to communion among the Movements.

In Strasbourg, France, she receives the 1998 Human Rights Prize from the Council of Europe.

In Bern, Switzerland, she makes a presentation as part of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Swiss Constitution.

1999 – In Strasbourg, France, she speaks to the Conference for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Council of Europe. In her address,

“A Market-based Society, Democracy, and Solidarity,” she presents the experience of the Economy of Communion as the basis of a new way of conducting business.

At Spyer, Germany, she brings a message of encouragement from Pope John Paul II to a meeting of the founders and leaders of 41 Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, organized by the Community of Saint Egidio and the Renewal in the Holy Spirit.

In Augsburg, Germany, she joins in the ceremony of signing the historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, and meets with the highest authorities of the worldwide Lutheran Federation.

2000 – She receives honorary citizenships from Rome and from Florence. In recent years, she had received another seventeen such honours, including those from Palermo, Genoa, Turin, Milan, and Buenos Aires.

She receives the Great Cross of Merit from the Federal Republic of Germany.

At Rothenburg, Germany, she meets with representatives of fifty Evangelical Lutheran Movements.

In Washington D. C., she speaks to a gathering of more than 5,000 people, including Christians and members of the American Muslim Society. A fraternal dialogue begins in many different cities across the United States.

In Rome, at the Italian parliament’s Palazzo San Macuto, she presents to a large crowd of politicians the ideals of the Movement for Unity in Politics.

At Assisi, she advocates a journey toward communion among old and new charisms, beginning with the different branches of the Franciscan family.

2001 – In Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India, she receives the Defender of Peace Prize from two Gandhian organisations, the Shanti Ashram and the Sarvodaya Movement. She also shares the story of her spiritual journey at the Somaya University, Mumbai.

In Prague, the Czech Republic, she meets with President Vaclav Havel.

At Bratislava, in Slovakia, during a gathering of the National Parliament, she presents “A Politics of Communion” to 150 deputies and local mayors.

At Innsbruck, Austria, she participates at the Convention, “1000 Cities for Europe.” She is invited to speak on fraternity as a political concept.

2002 – At Castel Gandolfo, Italy, she supports the first symposium on interreligious dialogue among members of the Abba School and authoritative scholars and professors of Hinduism.

In Geneva, Switzerland, invited by the President of the Protestant Church of Geneva, she speaks about ecumenism in Saint Peter’s Cathedral during Sunday Service. At the Ecumenical Council of Churches, she proposes the “spirituality of communion” as an “ecumenical spirituality.”

In Montserrat, she speaks of her life experience to 400 nuns and sisters. In Madrid, she offers her political message in the local seat of the European Parliament, speaking before a hall filled with politicians and administrators.

2003 -In Mumbai, she deepens the dialogue with Hinduism that began during her first visit to India in 2001. She speaks at the Somaya College, and Indian institute of higher learning dedicated principally to interreligious dialogue; at Bharatiya Didya Bhavan, a centre founded to rediscover the cultural roots of Hinduism; and with the Swadhyaya Family, a Movement of more than 8 million adherents spread throughout India. Invited by Cardinal Dias, in Mumbai she also presents the spirituality of unity to priests, members of religious congregations, and lay movements. At the request of Archbishop Conceçao, she repeats the presentation in Delhi.

Responding to Pope John Paul II's request that the Focolare Movement take responsibility for promoting the year dedicated to the Rosary for the peace of the world, she promotes an International Marian Congress at Castel Gandolfo. Based on that event, 157 other Congresses, local as well as national, will follow on all five continents, at both local and national levels.

2004 – The president of the Republic of Italy presents her with the insignia of a “Cavaliere di Gran Croce” (Knight of the Great Cross).

A daylong celebration, “Together for Europe,” is held in Stuttgart, Germany, to mark the widening of the European Union to 25 nations. It emerged from the developing communion among more than 150 movements and communities from various Churches, including Lutheran, Anglican, and Free Churches. Many political figures join the 9,000 participants, as well as another 100,000 who follow the event via live satellite transmission at 163 meetings taking place at the same time in other European cities.

2007 – On 7 December Sophia University Institute is erected by Pontifical Decree, based in the Focolare town of Loppiano. It is born as a further development of the Abba School. This is the last official act signed by Chiara Lubich.

2008 14 March -Following a long illness, after having been visited in hospital by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholemew I, and receiving a comforting personal letter from Benedict XVI, after having been visited at her bedside by hundreds of people Chiara dies at her home in Rocca di Papa, Italy.

Cause for Canonisation

A witness of faith and love – It is customary in the Catholic Church to present to the faithful as an encouragement to their Christian life, people who have distinguished themselves because of their special witness of faith and love for God and neighbour. This is done following a canonical process of verification which also examines the life patrimony of ideas and actions of that person. The process can be started no earlier than five years after their death.

In recent years, considering Chiara Lubich (1920-2008) and her legacy, ordinary and authoritative people – notwithstanding the diversity their respective visions – have expressed the hope that this could be the case for her as well. The aim of such recognition would be to encourage many others to further their spiritual and moral commitment for the good of the human family. It would be an incentive for them to

personally adopt the desire that was repeatedly expressed by Chiara: of becoming holy together, offering to the Church not only the sainthood of separate individuals, but that of a people. In this spirit, the president of the Focolare, Maria Voce, on December 7, 2013 announced the decision to solicit the opening of the Cause of Beatification of Chiara Lubich.

After a year of compliance with the canonical norms for the Opening of the Cause, the Bishop of Frascati, Italy, Raffaello Martinelli, has designated the 27th day of January 2015, as the date of the Solemn Opening of the "Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God Chiara Lubich." In a letter addressed to the Focolare Movement, Maria Voce was delighted to announce the Opening of the Cause, inviting everyone who adheres to the spirituality of unity to be a "living witness" of what Chiara had lived, proclaimed and shared with so many, through a common effort to become holy together."

The Opening Ceremony, known as the Prima Sessio (first session), was held at the Cathedral of Frascati, beginning at 16:00 with Vespers. It included the reading of the Decree of introduction of the Cause and of the Rescript nulla osta (no impediment) of the Holy See; the establishment of the tribunal appointed by the Bishop; and the oaths of the Bishop, the members of the Tribunal and of the Postulation.

The ceremony was followed live via the Internet, so that those who cannot be physically present, could still take part. Indeed, there is already wide interest and participation by countless people, religious leaders and academics from around the world, which is already an indication of the impact that the life of Chiara Lubich has had worldwide.

Her funeral was attended by tens of thousands of people, held on March 18, 2008 at the Papal Basilica of Saint Paul's Outside the Walls. In his message Benedict XVI called Chiara,

among other things, a “Woman of intrepid faith, a meek messenger of hope and peace.”

That her witness continues to be a light to many is also shown by the constant flow of people in the six years since her death, to the place she lived and now rests: over 120,000 people from different continents and religious traditions, bishops and cardinals, academics, politicians, families, children and young adults have visited her tomb at the Focolare’s International Centre in Rocca di Papa, Italy – all in search of hope.

She had an idea of holiness that was firmly rooted in the Gospel, from which she drew nourishment throughout her life. Chiara wrote: “We find holiness in Jesus, who blossoms within us because we love. . . If we sought holiness for its own sake, we would never reach it, ever. Love, then, and nothing else. Lose everything, even any attachment to holiness, so that you can tend only towards loving.” We’ll become saints, she explained, “if we have at the basis of our holiness – ante omnia, before all else, also before sainthood – mutual love: Jesus in our midst as the premise or origin, as the means for becoming holy and as the goal.

Prayer of Intercession

Eternal Father, source of Love,
and of every light and goodness,
we give You thanks
for the charism of unity given to Chiara
and for the remarkable witness
to the Church and humanity that she gave of this charism,
remaining faithful to Jesus Forsaken.
Grant us, O Father,
through the action of the Holy Spirit

and the Word lived in the present moment,
and in following Chiara's example,
the grace to contribute
together with all people of good will
to the fulfilment of Your Son's will:
"That they may all be one!"
Humbly we ask You to grant us, Your children,
to live in mutual love and in love of all
so as to rejoice in the presence of the Risen One while,
in communion with Chiara and through her intercession,
we ask You, if it be Your will,
the grace ... (the personal petition is expressed)
through Jesus and for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity.
Amen.

With ecclesiastic approval Cardinal João Braz de Aviz

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In memoria

The solemn opening of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God Chiara Lubich took place on January 27, 2015, begun by Raffaello Matinelli, Bishop of Frascati, Italy.

"At the opening of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Chiara Lubich," reads the message of the Pope, "held in Frascati Cathedral, His Holiness Pope Francis sends his cordial thoughts, hoping that the shining example of the life of

the founder of the Focolare Movement arouses in those who keep her precious spiritual heritage, faithful renewed resolutions of generous adherence to Christ and of service to the unity of the Church. The Holy Father invokes abundant gifts of the Divine Spirit upon those engaged in the postulation and calls upon all to make known to the People of God the life and works of one who, accepting the Lord's invitation, opened for the Church a new light on the road towards unity and, while asking for prayers in support of his universal ministry as the successor of Peter, through the intercession of the Holy Virgin, he extends to Your Excellency, to the postulation, to the entire Work of Mary and to all who participate in the joyous event his Apostolic Blessing." (Vatican City, January 27, 2015)

Ever since her death on March 14, 2008, not only has the fame of holiness of the Servant of God, Chiara Lubich not ended, but it continues to increase. There have been civil and religious public events to remember her, commemorations, awards, naming of schools, squares, public gardens, streets, plaques, academic chairs, companies, and reports of graces obtained through her intercession that would fill volumes. Some of the more significant posthumous recognitions are listed chronologically below in response to Pope Francis's exhortation to make known to the People of God the life and works of one who, accepting the Lord's invitation, opened for the Church a new light on the road towards unity."