

Belfast, 14 June 2012  
**Ecumenical Meeting, St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast**

**The Culture of Trust**  
Maria Voce

Dear Friends,

I am very happy to be here with you.

I thank Rev. John Mann for his invitation to spend this time together and I greet the religious and political leaders present and each one of you.

Belfast recently took its place on the worldwide stage of the Focolare Movement through its participation in the Run4Unity, a virtual relay race. Young people pass the baton from country to country across the globe to cover the world with a rainbow of peace and unity promoting the Golden Rule. The Northern Ireland leg took place in Stormont. Along with more than 400 young people, there were representatives of different political parties and religious leaders. I would like to take this opportunity to thank some of them who are here today for their contribution and support.

I was asked to speak this evening on the theme: "Building community through a culture of trust".

I learned that the Good Friday agreement emphasizes the desire for a new beginning and speaks of 'dedication to bringing about reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust'.

For us Christians, the link between building communion and the culture of trust has its foundation in God. If God, who is in himself love and therefore communion, loves us immensely and trusts that we can build communion in all corners of the earth by uniting ourselves to His Son Jesus, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we can and we must trust one another to carry ahead this wonderful project.

Recently I was in Guatemala, where I met people of the different cultures which make up this people - the Maya, Garifuna, Xinca, Mestizo ... In that context we said that in a world in need of cohesion and solidarity, we must let go of the prevailing "culture of suspicion," so that a "culture of trust" can decisively take root. This is needed both in our personal feelings towards other people, and in building with dedication, day after day, a new cultural foundation, which can be a source of social coexistence respectful of diversity.

How can we promote this culture? This evening I would like to focus on three elements: the art of loving that can be found in the Gospel; reciprocal love that arrives to a pact; and Jesus Crucified and Forsaken, model and key of love.

Of course I speak in the light of the spirituality of unity, characteristic of the Focolare Movement, which I represent.

### **The art of loving**

From the very beginning of the Focolare Movement, which was born during the Second World War, one of the things that the Holy Spirit suggested to Chiara Lubich, founder of the movement, was to *live* the Gospel and she understood that it contained an "art" of loving which brings about community, putting at its foundation new relationships of trust. In fact, the love that Jesus brought to this earth has some typical characteristics which generate trust. For example:

- 1) Christian love takes the initiative in loving, it does not wait to be loved, it does not love for self-interest or for other reasons. This is what Jesus did as we read in St. Paul's letter to the Romans: "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5, 5);
- 2) Christian love consists in loving your neighbour "as yourself" (cf. Gal 5.14). The other is really "another me";
- 3) Christian love prompts us to act like our heavenly Father who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Rom, 5, 45). That is, the love of the Gospel urges us to love everyone, really everyone, without the usual distinctions that we make so easily between people of different political parties, different churches, different views;

- 4) Christian love includes love for our enemies: "Love your enemies - says Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew - and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:43-48).

Living this art which needs to be learned afresh every day, radiates confidence.

Let me tell you an experience. For several years the families of our movement have been using a dice, the so-called "cube of love". On each side there is a phrase which reminds us how to love evangelically. Every day they roll the dice and then try to live the phrase during the day and, then at the opportune time, share their experiences of doing so. Flor de Maria, a young girl from Mexico, describes her experience: "When there is a difficulty, I always try to love. For example, the other day my mother and father had quarrelled. I was sad and I thought: 'How I wish they were happy! What can I do? I went to José and Juan, my brothers. We drew some hearts and flowers on coloured paper that we stuck on the wall. Then we went to Mum and Dad who were watching TV in silence. We turned off the TV and I sang a song about the love between us. They said sorry to one another, and Mum started crying with joy. I was very happy too because finally peace returned to our family, and I thanked Jesus. "

Of course, the Art of Loving is not just for children or families.

Friedrich Aschoff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany, inspired by the Gospel, took an initiative. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second World War II, together with others who joined the project, he visited 23 countries which had been invaded by Hitler's army, in order to acknowledge the guilt of their people, and pray and ask God for forgiveness. And so many "paths of reconciliation" came to life in areas traditionally associated with evil. There are many moving stories of encounters and deep reconciliation lived in Israel, the United Kingdom, Russia and Poland, with many new friendships formed.

## **Mutual Love**

In the early days of the Focolare Movement, always facing death because of the war which was raging, the Holy Spirit had aroused in the heart of Chiara and her companions, the desire to present themselves

before God, having lived, at least in their last minutes, what Jesus had in his heart more than anything else: the new commandment. "I give you a new commandment: love one another, as I have loved you, so you must love one another" (Jn 13, 34). It is a love that knows how to give and how to receive, a love that is mutual.

This desire was sealed with a pact. They looked one another in the eyes and said: "I want to be ready to die for you", "I for you". Each one for the other. We try to live like this still today too and we often renew this pact. Certainly we are not always asked to die physically for our neighbours, but we can do so spiritually, serving and helping one another even in the smallest of ways.

An expression of this mutual love is reciprocal forgiveness that drives us to get up every morning and see one another completely "new", forgetting the defects seen the day before!

The pact of mutual love is not just limited to the relationships between individuals but can also be lived between communities. For example, it is being practised between about 250 communities and movements participating in the "Together for Europe" project to help give a soul to Europe's politics and economics.

In London last September, in the context of the annual meeting of the Ecumenical Bishops friends of the Focolare Movement, more than thirty bishops from various traditions came together in the Anglican Shrine of the first martyr of Britain, St Alban. After reading Jesus' prayer for unity in the Gospel of John, in a warm climate of fraternal love, they all signed a "pact" of mutual love in which they promised to love each other to the point of giving their life for one another and to love the church of the others as their own churches. The Anglican Bishop Robin Smith said: "For me it is a deeply spiritual experience. I feel so connected to these bishops. There is a deep bond of respect and instead of taking something away from our unity, our differences enrich us."

In Fontem in the Cameroon, encouraged by Chiara Lubich who visited there in 2000, two Fon (i.e. two kings) of two tribes that were not on good terms, made a pact of mutual love, bringing their peoples into a new relationship, almost a new beginning of political fraternity among these peoples.

Yes, making a pact of mutual love creates a space within which we can grow in trust. This pact strengthens us in that journey.

## **Jesus Crucified and Forsaken**

Undoubtedly, though, trials come and always will as long as we are on this earth. This is why we have always before us, as our model, the figure of Jesus crucified in that moment when he had the terrible feeling that the Father himself had abandoned him and he cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). However he did not stop in that abyss of sorrow. Saying: "Into your hands, Father, I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), he went beyond it and gained the Resurrection while procuring for all of us communion with God and with one another.

Who more than He might have doubted the love of God and judged the behaviour of criminals? Yet he continued to believe in the Father and to love humanity. Here is the model of a culture of trust that creates communion. Even when he didn't see the positive, he believed, he trusted, he loved.

Abandoned on the Cross, Jesus is the figure of the broken, the betrayed. He is fearful, confused, asking "why?". Yet to all who see themselves like him and are willing to share his fate with him, he becomes: for those in despair, hope; for those betrayed, loyalty; for those who have failed, victory; for the fearful, courage; for the sad: joy; for all who are uncertain, security, for the disheartened, trust.

So we try to imitate Him by overcoming every trial, even temptations against faith.

This is the experience of Sally McAllister, one of the first members of Focolare in Belfast.

Just back from Italy where she met our spirituality in one of the little towns of the Movement where the law is mutual love, she met her first challenge. While she went out to buy some milk with a friend, she noticed a gang of young men who were waiting at the exit of the store ready to attack. She was hit in the back with a brick. Sally thought, "if

you believe in what you saw lived in that little town of mutual love, this is the time to put it into practice. Forgiveness starts here." It was her first encounter with Jesus Crucified and Forsaken. She found the strength to forgive and began to live in a new way.

Yes, Jesus Crucified and Forsaken is the "law" that should inform all relationships, not only between individual Christians, but also between ministers and the faithful, between the churches, between communities, in all the tensions that can arise between us. It is with love for Jesus Crucified and Forsaken that we find the strength to go beyond the difficulties.

For many years, two Belfast schools from different sides of the then very divided community of Northern Ireland, have been working closely on joint projects. A few years ago, a school in County Kildare, Republic of Ireland, joined them in these projects. Together they have built relationships of trust and brotherhood.

In 2009, one of these schools, the primary school in Whitehouse, was destroyed by arson. Seeing in this suffering the face of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken, someone had an idea: let's organize a solidarity concert entitled "All for All". The concert was a great success and above all a testimony, as stated by the Unionist Mayor: "You are giving a strong witness in the community."

David Stevens of the Corrymeela Community, a great protagonist of reconciliation in Northern Ireland, commenting on the connection proposed by Chiara Lubich between unity and Jesus Forsaken, said that it was Jesus Forsaken who led Chiara to build bridges of understanding with others and we should follow her in this.

Paradoxically, Jesus Forsaken reveals the tenacity of the dialogue between God and humanity. He did not give up. He is the One who will provide time and space. He is the God-in-relationship that we need.<sup>i</sup>

## **Conclusion**

And so, dear friends, I draw to a conclusion.

The plan of God for us, as well as for all humankind, is communion, a reflection of the Trinitarian life of God. Living the art of loving, especially

love for each other, and recognizing and loving Jesus Forsaken in every suspicion, judgment, and difficulty that we find in our relationships, we can become men and women who know how to be trusting and so create communion.

Of course, here in Belfast, one cannot but think with gratitude of the many initiatives carried out with such heroism to build and develop peace. One cannot but imagine how many tears have been shed during the years of the troubles and how they have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the Spirit of reconciliation and trust of which Northern Ireland is becoming more and more a model.

May this be ever more so for the glory of God. Seeing our trust, He will not be outdone in generosity and will reward our efforts to build communion with His presence as He promised in Matthew 18-20: "Where two or more are united in My name, there am I in their midst. "

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<sup>i</sup> Corrymeela Service of Dedication, January 2009, Leader's Address