

## Conference

"Together in love, from dialogue to cooperation"

Golden Theatre, Palermo, 13 May 2013

### Greeting and message by Maria Voce President of the Focolare Movement

I greet His Excellency, Mons. Corrado Lorefica,  
the pastors and leaders of various historical and more recently established Churches,  
the civil and religious leaders here present,  
representatives from the worlds of culture and information  
and all of you here today.

Dear friends,

It is a great joy for me to be here today, on behalf of the Focolare Movement. Thank you for the invitation!

As I have been informed, this Conference, entitled **"Together in Charity, from Dialogue to Cooperation"**, is special and new kind of meeting. It is not explicitly aimed at ecumenical dialogue, but wants to create the conditions for dialogue by working together as Churches, starting from personal relationships built up over time among members of these same Churches.

The Conference therefore is setting out to be a time of renewal and enhancement of this reciprocity, a time for reflection and a new stimulus to work together for the good of humanity.

In this particular commitment of our Churches, I see a concrete response to one of the imperatives of the declaration of the Lutheran-Catholic International Commission, *From Conflict to Communion* (2013), which was reconfirmed by Catholics and Lutherans in Lund, on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016.

It is a call to "bear witness together to God's mercy in proclaiming the Gospel and serving the world". The starting point must therefore be that of unity and communion, in order to witness together to faith in Christ and render a service that is useful to all humanity. The world awaits our witness! Because unity among us is not an end in itself, but is for the world, and I would say it is more urgent now, above all to obtain the gift of peace.

We know very well the deeper reason for terrorism and all forms of violence. It is resentment, compressed hatred and the desire for revenge, nurtured by individuals and peoples who have been oppressed over time by the many forms of separation present in the

world, and especially by the division of our planet into two parts: the rich and the poor, who are, too often, wretchedly poor. What is often missing is being able to treat one another as brothers and sisters; what is missing is fellowship, solidarity and sharing. Goods must be shared, but we know that goods do not move on their own, we need to move hearts.

What can the spirituality of the Focolare Movement, also called the "spirituality of unity" or "of communion", offer to fulfill this goal? From 1943 onwards, God used a divine teaching method with the founder of our Movement, Chiara Lubich, and her first companions. He taught them step by step how to achieve unity.

Faced with the collapse of all types of ideal, even the most sublime, God made them discover that only he does not pass and that he is Love. To respond to his Love, they wanted to live the words of Jesus literally, and Jesus taught them that all people are children of one Father and, therefore, all are brothers and sisters to one another. By identifying himself with every person, Jesus explained to them that each neighbor should be loved, without distinction and with deeds.

And if difficulties, obstacles and pain are not lacking along the way, Jesus revealed to Chiara the secret to transform every suffering into new life. If we unite ourselves to him, who, forsaken on the cross, took upon himself all evil and all divisions in humanity to redeem humanity, we will feel the strength and have the light to begin again. Then, if this love is lived by two or more, it becomes reciprocal, bringing about "love one another as I have loved you" (cf. Jn 15:12). It happens then that Jesus is attracted by this love and comes to dwell among those "two or more gathered in his name" (cf. Mt 18:20).

That is how it is. It is precisely Jesus present among us who can make all become "one Christian family, a family that no one can separate, because it is Christ who binds us all together".<sup>1</sup>

This presence of his, among Christians of different Churches, has led, for years now, to a new type of dialogue: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of the people, which includes the entire people of God, lay people and Church leaders. It forms a leaven in the great Ecumenical Movement to awaken and grow the desire for unity in Christians.

Dear brothers and sisters, to conclude I would like to underline what I said in our "Ottmaring Declaration", in February 2017, with which we wanted to reaffirm our ecumenical commitment as Focolare Movement, precisely in the wake of the Lund events.

Jesus said that the world would recognize us as his own (and, through us, it would recognize him) through mutual love: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

If the world can meet Jesus, present among us through mutual love, faith will be reborn in many, their way of thinking and behaving will change. The search for peace and just solutions will be victorious and the commitment to solidarity among peoples will grow. I am sure that the relationships of cooperation amongst us - carried forward on a level of equality, respect and esteem - will foster friendship and fraternal love. Ecumenical dialogue,

which has been so fruitful and promising for years here in Sicily, will then bear even greater fruit.

Today, my wish is that together we can remain "on the journey" with Jesus among us "so that the world may believe".

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<sup>1</sup> Chiara Lubich, Dialogue is life, Città Nuova 2007, p. 26