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Pontifical Theological Faculty, Sicily,

Reading the charism of unity in dialogue with the churches of Sicily

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Premise

I am very pleased to be here representing the Focolare Movement now, in the year 2018, during which the city of Palermo is the Italian capital of culture. It is moving for me to note that this event is taking place exactly twenty years after the conferral of Palermo's honorary citizenship on Chiara Lubich, an honour she received with enthusiasm and gratitude.

These are small coincidences that are linked together by the imperceptible "golden thread" that leads and guides human history.

Reading the charism of unity

As I arrived here in Palermo, at this favourable time when so many events are focussing on this city, I recalled the kind words that Chiara addressed to Palermo on the 20th January, 1998. She said, "We promise that Palermo will always be present in our hearts, in our prayers and when we plan our commitments, so that, through the boldness and courage of its citizens, it may know how to become a model for many other cities in Italy and beyond, as a true "city on the hilltop".

I also became strongly aware of the "word" of love that God chose to put once more into focus, through the charism he gave Chiara, for humanity today. A "word", which I believe today, was pronounced as the very vocation of this city. This "word" is entirely contained in the testament of Jesus: "May they all be one" (Jn 17:21).

Chiara Lubich left for Heaven ten years ago, but we inherited indelible signs of her constant commitment to fellowship in the Church, to ecumenical dialogue and to a sense of family among all peoples.

She was in fact a charismatic woman, who founded a Work whose branches have reached all latitudes and which aims to plant within humanity the seeds of evangelical life that accompany it on its journey towards universal fraternity.

Right from the 1940s Chiara's longing for this was evident in words full of zeal and ardour that warmed the hearts of her companions. "Let's look around us - she wrote - we are all brothers and sisters: excluding no one!" In this way she exhorted us to live for "universal brotherhood in one Father, God, who is in Heaven".¹

It is a program that can be implemented in every city, but which finds particularly fertile ground right here, in Palermo, a place - as Chiara pointed out - "where there has been centuries of encounter between different peoples, cultures and civilizations"; a city rooted in "the values of accepting diversity, solidarity and generosity".²

Chiara looked to all humanity with the desire to "bring heaven to earth and earth to heaven", which is the real "homeland", the only "homeland" of all.

When people migrate to a distant country, - she observed - even though they of course adapt to their new environment, they often continue to speak their own language, they dress as people dressed in their country of origin and construct buildings similar to those in their homeland.

When the Word of God became man, he adapted himself to the way of life of the world. He was a child and an exemplary son, and as an adult he worked hard. But he also brought the way of life of his heavenly homeland down to us. He wanted people and things to reconfigure themselves in a new order, according to the law of heaven, which is love.³

Chiara's longing for unity must be understood through the lens of this light-filled vision of humankind and the cosmos. Her prophetic intuition saw, many years before the Second Vatican Council, that every man and woman on earth (factory workers, fishermen, migrants, teachers, members of parliament, students ...)⁴, individually and all together, in whatever situation they find themselves, are called to build the "civilization of love".

A spirituality of communion

At this point we might ask ourselves: what has the charism of Chiara Lubich – which is recognized as a fully ecclesial charism - given and can continue to give to the universal Church? What is its specific contribution? Furthermore, what has it given and can still give to particular churches, and therefore to churches in Sicily too? With the charism of unity, first of all, a new spirituality began, a "new way" in the Church: a spirituality in which – Chiara said - "the life of the Trinity is no longer lived only within persons, but flows freely among the members of the mystical Body of Christ".⁵

This spirituality is fully in accordance with the Second Vatican Council, which laid particular emphasis on the importance of the ecclesiology of communion, guiding the Church to experience to the full its being in the image of the Trinity and its mission to witness to unity in the world.⁶

In this era, which has been defined as the "era of the global village", and in which humanity feels more and more called "to be one family", a communitarian spirituality like this seems to respond to this need.

After more than seventy years of experience in our Movement, we can say that the communitarian spirituality, when placed as the basis of personal and social life, brings a remarkable renewal in the most varied areas of human life: in politics, economics, culture, art, medicine, education, social communications and so on ...

From this spirituality of communion we also saw fellowship growing within the Church among the various ecclesial Movements that enrich it, and between the various older and newer charisms. We have also seen how helpful it is in contributing to Christian unity and also to establishing dialogue with people of other religions. This represents one of the most demanding and urgent frontiers of the third millennium.

It is a reality that we have been able to experience even in local churches.

When Chiara came to Sicily in 1998, right here to Palermo, she recalled the key stages of the Movement's life here. We can recognise this now, 20 years after that event.

Despite the countless crises of recent years, and precisely within these crises, the profound commitment of the Movement's members in Sicily is to witness to and build the unity of the human family wherever it is most fragile and at risk.

This is how they respond to Chiara's appeal, urging them to *"build a new culture, a culture of human rights, a culture of legality, a culture of love, a culture of life (...) and not of death"*.⁷ A whole new culture whose roots, however, are in Christianity. When urging them to "find a way" to spread this culture, Chiara suggested starting within the Catholic Church: getting to know other Movements, other parishes, other associations and groups; to love them and understand them. And then bring unity among them all.

I believe we can say some steps have been taken towards this goal. Of course, there is still a long way to go, but it is a commitment we want to renew today, too, with the whole Movement: to make our contribution towards creating that "new civilization", which contains all the values that are, unfortunately, so often trampled on, and continue growing *"without forgetting - as Chiara recalled - all our Christian brothers and sisters, without forgetting the other religions, without forgetting anyone"*.⁸

In this way it will be truly possible to give rise to a new culture, to the culture of unity, to the culture that Chiara so often defined as the "culture of resurrection".

The "Resurrection of Rome ": culture of resurrection

In a well-known writing from 1949, called the "Resurrection of Rome", what is meant by a "culture of resurrection" is clearly explained. It is a text that is emblematic for us in considering any city and working in it. In fact, here Chiara communicates her personal experience and offers us a new perspective from which to address all the challenges of our time. I will read you a few extracts:

"If I look at this city of Rome, as it is, I feel that my Ideal is far off, as far off as the times when great saints and great martyrs shed eternal light around themselves, even on the walls of these monuments, which are still standing and bear witness to the love uniting the early Christians.

This is in such incredible contrast to the vain and dirty worldliness, which dominates the streets, and to an even greater extent conceals itself in the hidden corners of houses where anger and every kind of sin and disturbance lurk.

I would call my Ideal a utopia if I did not think of the One who also saw a world like this around him and who, at the height of his life seemed overwhelmed by it, as though evil had defeated him.

He, too, looked out upon a great crowd, which he loved as he loved himself. He who had created the world would have wanted to extend the bonds that were to unite all to himself as children to their Father, and to unite brothers and sisters to one another.

He had come to bring the family back together—to make all people one. This is what was said at the start of this brief talk.

Instead—in spite of his words of Fire and Truth that burned to ashes the deadwood of vanities, which buried the Eternal existing within people and among people, —many, although they comprehended his words, did not want to understand, and their eyes remained blank because their souls were in darkness.”

In front of such a negative situation, Chiara nonetheless saw that Jesus “Looked at the world” just as she saw it, “but did not doubt”.

This is what she decided, which we can do too:

“And I will do the same as He I look at the world within me; I hold on to what has meaning and value.

In this way, opening my eyes to what is outside of me, I see humanity with the eyes of God who is all-trusting because he is Love.

...

Jesus must see his resurrection in the Eternal City and be made present everywhere. He is Life, complete Life. And not only in the religious realm.... To separate him from the total life of a person is a practical heresy of our times. It enslaves people to something that is beneath them, relegating God, who is Father, somewhere far from his children.

...

No, he is the Man, the perfect person, summarizing in himself all people and all truth and every impulse that they might have to elevate themselves to their rightful place.

And whoever has found this Man, has found the solution to every problem, whether human or divine. It is enough to love him.”⁹

This is how the culture of resurrection progresses, that Chiara made available to all of us, and that she makes available in a special way today, in Palermo, with the hope that this city can truly be "the Italian capital of culture" but of a "culture" that it is "of resurrection", a true "city on the hilltop".

¹ C. Lubich - I. Giordani, *Erano i tempi di guerra*, Roma 2007, p. 65.

² Cf. C. Lubich, *Discorso* in occasione del ricevimento della Cittadinanza onoraria, Palermo (Palazzo delle Aquile), 20 gennaio 1998.

³ C. Lubich, *Lectio magistralis* in occasione del conferimento del dottorato *h.c.* da parte dell'Università di Trnava, Castel Gandolfo, 23 giugno 2003.

⁴ Cf. C. Lubich, *Meditazioni*, Città Nuova, Roma 1959, pp. 73-74: "Tu, io, il lattaio, il contadino, il portiere, il pescatore, l'operaio, lo strillone... E gli altri tutti, delusi idealisti, mamme cariche di pesi, innamorati in prossimità di nozze, vecchiette spente in attesa della morte, ragazzi frementi, tutti... Tutti son materia prima per la società di Dio: basta in loro un cuore, che tenga alta, dritta, puntata in Dio la fiamma dell'amore".

⁵ C. Lubich, *Lectio magistralis* in occasione del conferimento del dottorato *h.c.* da parte dell'Università di Trnava, Castel Gandolfo, 23 giugno 2003.

⁶ È ciò che ampiamente confermerà anche la Lettera apostolica *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, dove Giovanni Paolo II propone la "spiritualità di comunione" a tutta la Chiesa perché sia da essa vissuta. Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 43-45, *EV* 20 (2001) 85-90.

⁷ Cf. C. Lubich, *Risposte agli interni della zona di Sicilia, Calabria e Malta*, Palermo (Fiera del Mediterraneo), 18 gennaio 1998.

⁸ Cf. C. Lubich, *Risposte agli interni della zona di Sicilia, Calabria e Malta*, Palermo (Fiera del Mediterraneo), 18 gennaio 1998.

⁹ Cf. C. Lubich, *Resurrezione di Roma*, Scritto [Ottobre 1949].