

A Charism in History as a View from the Center

Piero Coda
Sophia University Institute

The author presents an “interpretative key” to understand the charism of Chiara Lubich. Like all charisms, it gives light into the revelation of the Word in flesh in ways that guide and enrich all humanity. Chiara’s charism, the author argues, is one that provides a convergent guide that safeguards all cultures for the mutual enrichment of humankind. Since we live in a bewildered, wounded, and fluid world today, Chiara’s charism, that is light coming from the darkness of World War II, has its center in the hidden wound on Christ’s soul when he cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The author points out that this is not a center to look at, but one to look from at the world in order to help all persons find themselves in mutual relatedness—each as gift for the others in the pattern of the Trinity.

Chiara Lubich was a bearer and witness of a charism, that is, of a gift of light and life for humanity in our times.

We cannot but sincerely and, we hope, responsibly be grateful in the midst of our amazement at Chiara’s personal witness. Also a matter of amazement is what came about so abundantly from the gift of light and fire that she received and that so soon reached the ends of the earth. This gift has touched the hearts and minds of men and women of every faith and conviction through nothing more than the strength of love and the persuasive force of wisdom, overcoming everything put in its way.

Chiara’s charism is recognized both by persons with a secular worldview and by persons guided by faithfulness to religious inspiration who have eyes to see and value the ideal stirrings at work for what is positive and just. They see her charism affecting human events and encouraging history in the direction of future prospects that foster a more mature and united humanity. It is a charism that has been studied and accepted as new and fruitful by the Catholic Church in which it was born. But it has also been studied and accepted by other Christian churches searching for that full and free unity desired by Jesus.

But what is a charism¹ and what is the original gift that *this charism* brings: the charism that defines itself and can be recognized in a few meaningful words: the *charism of unity*? I do not presume to give an adequate response in this brief article. I intend simply to offer an interpretive key that could suggest a wider, more

1. In light of Catholic theology, see Fabio Ciardi, *Carismi: Vangelo che si fa storia* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011); and Marc Ouellet, *La sfida dell’unità: I carismi e la Trinità*, (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011).

detailed dialogue enriched by a host of voices that would make it more precise and useful.

Let us begin with a quote from Hans Urs von Balthasar, one of the giants of twentieth-century theology.

Von Balthasar considers in his *Theo-logic* the great charisms that through the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the centuries illustrate and detail the light of Jesus Christ in which, according to Christian faith, the Word of God “made flesh” (Jn 1:14) shines forth in the world. Von Balthasar describes these charisms as lucid insights “into the heart of Revelation.”² Thanks to these charisms, the eyes of the heart and of the mind are able to see more clearly, drawing out from what they perceive ever new and more effective energies for life and engagement with history, all within the original and progressive gift through which God communicates his own life, which is light for all (see Jn 1:4).

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II³ highlighted the fact that this definition of a charism holds true for

every ray of understanding that has enriched the life of humanity throughout history. An eloquent icon of this generous and hope-filled vision was the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986. Pope John Paul II organized the event and invited representatives of different faiths to attend. This vision was further enriched twenty-five years later by Pope Benedict XVI through the added presence at a similar day of “pilgrims of truth and peace.”⁴ Assisi renewed the vision that Vatican II had brought back into focus with prophecy and vigor. The event, in a spirit of fraternity and peace, gathered around Jesus, the new and universal Man, charisms from the many paths of history that include us all and that, at first sight, have often appeared to be truncated and divergent.

Therefore, it is a matter of looking “towards the center” together with everyone else as a sign of justice and peace. In this way, the views and insights, energies, and practical methods used and promoted by each in his or her search for truth and goodness can circulate among everyone. This is the *identity and the mission of a charism*. Charisms are called to stand out clearly in their particular

at the heart of the cultures of humanity, underlined, “It must first be kept in mind that every quest of the human spirit for truth and goodness, and in the last analysis for God, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The various religions arose precisely from this primordial human openness to God. At their origins we often find founders who, with the help of God’s Spirit, achieved a deeper religious experience. Handed on to others, this experience took form in the doctrines, rites and precepts of the various religions.” (General Audience, September 9, 1998, n. 2)

4. See talk by Benedict XVI, October 27, 2011, at the *Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World: “Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace”*: “In addition to the two phenomena of religion and anti-religion, a further basic orientation is found in the growing world of agnosticism: people to whom the gift of faith has not been given, but who are nevertheless on the lookout for truth, searching for God. Such people do not simply assert: ‘There is no God.’ They suffer from his absence and yet are inwardly making their way towards him, inasmuch as they seek truth and goodness. They are ‘pilgrims of truth, pilgrims of peace.’ They ask questions of both sides.”

2. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-logic*, Vol. III: *The Spirit of Truth* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1992), 22: “Great charisms such as that of Augustine, Francis and Ignatius can receive from the Holy Spirit glimpses into the heart of revelation, glimpses that enrich the Church in a totally unexpected but lasting way. Each time, they are charisms in which intelligence, love and imitation are inseparable. From this we can recognize that the Spirit of understanding is at once divine wisdom and divine love, and in no case pure theory, but always a living praxis. A last trait is typical of the Spirit: he infuses the divine fullness of the infinite, but only always so as to unify it again and always more.”

3. See *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22: “for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.” On the other hand, John Paul II, illustrating in his preparatory catechesis for the Jubilee Year 2000 the unceasing and universal action of the Holy Spirit

and highest meaning. This is needed above all and in a new way in the world today. Even in the midst of the world's agonizing and painful contradictions, the idea of a free and diverse family of peoples and nations has become both urgent and practicable. Indeed, we can see in our times, albeit in a radically different way, a movement that corresponds to what Karl Jaspers has identified as an "axial period" of civilization, such as can be seen in the centuries before the coming of Jesus Christ with the appearance of figures such as the Buddha, Lao-Tzu, Socrates, Zarathustra, and Isaiah.⁵

In fact, the direction of history evident in the precious seeds of life and rays of light⁶ guiding the development of peoples in the axial age was a *centrifugal* force. It aimed at defining the identities and richness of different societies, starting with their ideal aspirations. Today many signs suggest that there is a call to go in the opposite direction, that is, from *centrifugal* to *centripetal*, from *divergent* to *convergent*, so as to favor an encounter and an exchange of the gifts among societies. At the same time, the identity and mission of each society must also be safeguarded and promoted precisely with a view to the mutual enrichment of all.

Yet, what often seems lost, if not irreparably destroyed, today is a shared sense of what can credibly and usefully guide our personal and social lives.

5. See Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953); Arnold Toynbee, *Mankind and Mother Earth: A Narrative History of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); Antonio Rizzi, "Periodo assiale e universalità," in *Gesù e la salvezza: Tra fede, religioni e laicità*, (Rome: Città Nuova, 2001), 158–65; Ewert Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* (Rockport: Element Books, 1992).

6. This is the language, taken from biblical writings and the tradition of the church, used precisely by Vatican II in *Nostra Aetate* on the church's relations with other faiths.

Today, it is often as though the eyes of the soul cannot see the inner core that anchors it and gives direction. As a consequence, we cannot find the focal point for our projects and actions, the point around which and for which they orbit with liberated creativity.⁷ It is what the madman in Friedrich Nietzsche's parable of "The Madman" penetratingly, provocatively, and prophetically foretold:

What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker?⁸

It is true that today the perception of nothingness, of an emptiness of meaning, of the darkness in which the world seems to float, no longer takes on the tragic and final tone that Martin Heidegger gave it in the parable of nihilism that had reached its fulfilment.⁹ But what profoundly remains, as Zygmunt Bauman observes,¹⁰ is

7. See the lucid historical-theoretical phenomenology offered by Giuseppe Maria Zanghì in *La notte della cultura europea: Agonia della terra del tramonto?* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2007).

8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 181.

9. Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead,'" in ed. Julian Young, trans. Kenneth Hayes, *Martin Heidegger off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 157–200.

10. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2000).

the sad bewilderment of the self in the tempting but insidious space of a fluid society and globalized world. It is a bewilderment that may not know the painful consequences of desperation but it is nourished nevertheless with equal bitterness by daily uncertainties and a sense of resignation. While it does not satisfy, it suppresses the sincere desire for transformation, for constructiveness, and indeed for revolution dwelling in the consciousness of the coming generations in every region of the world, urging them on often in passionate and prophetic tones.

Chiara Lubich, in the darkest moment of the World War II, grasped this situation and allowed herself to be shaped inwardly by the particular ray of light and life that is the *charism of unity*.

She immediately shared this charism with those around her and thus gave life to the first Focolare community.¹¹ This event takes on symbolic and even universal meaning, as attested by the rapid, though always rather measured, spread of the Focolare and its vast impact in the world. All of this took place at a moment when the disintegration of the spiritual, cultural, and social balance, which until then had grounded human life in common, became an agonized openness with a heart-felt longing for the arrival of a charism of truth, love, and unity. Thus it was that in that openness

11. See the studies of Bernard Callebaut, *Tradition, charisme et prophétie dans le mouvement international des Focolari: Analyse sociologique* (Bruyères-le-Châtel: Nouvelle Cité, 2010) and Lucia Abignente, *Memoria e presente: La spiritualità del Movimento dei Focolari in prospettiva storica* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2010). Also significant is the delineation, in a number of voices and under a number of profiles, of the ecclesial and social context of the time (with reference above all to the city of Trent) in Andrea Leonardi, ed., *Comunione e innovazione sociale: Il contributo di Chiara Lubich* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2012).

there blossomed and swiftly took form from Chiara an Ideal of life and thought that was clearly centered on the gospel as its origin and purpose. At the same time, it was an Ideal that was immediately and wholly universal: *ut unum sint*, “May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you” (Jn 17:21).

For Chiara, in the context of the “historic” and “collective” dark night¹² into which humanity had plummeted in those years, this Ideal of hers did not remain a purely spiritual event, nor did it turn into a mere utopia. Rather, it became the *start of a new chapter of history*, born as it was from a radical sharing of the dizzying wound into which the whole story of humanity in the depths of war and hatred seemed to have been taken. The longing was to turn things upside down in their deepest depths, by entering fully into them out of love. Indeed Chiara sought to immerse herself in the woundedness of things, to take it on and pass through it, passionately following the example of Jesus who, believing in

12. John Paul II described in these very terms the spiritual and cultural quality of our time. He, re-evoking in Spain the figure and doctrine of Saint John of the Cross (“doctor of the Church because a great teacher of the living truth on God and on the human person”) and referring to the interpretation given by the latter to the cry of abandonment launched by Christ to the Father while on the cross, said: “The dark night, the trial that makes us touch the mystery of evil and demands the openness of faith, acquires at times epochal dimensions and collective proportions,” and he outlined a similar epochal and collective dark night “in the abyss of abandonment, in the temptation of nihilism, in the absurdity of many physical, moral and spiritual sufferings” that wound today’s humanity. For this reason, he concluded, “also the Christian and the very Church can feel *identified* with the Christ of Saint John of the Cross, at the height of his suffering and of his abandonment,” in order to reveal to the world today in faith, in hope, and above all in love, from within this very dark night, the dawn of a new resurrection (*Homily*, Segovia, November 4, 1982, n. 7). Chiara, referring to this talk, used a similar expression during the last years of her life to describe the trial that we are called to go through today in order to rekindle the light of the resurrection in the living flesh of today’s culture. See Chiara Lubich, “Jesus Forsaken and the Cultural and Collective Night,” *Charisms in Unity* 4 (2007): 5–11.

the Father and out of love for his brothers and sisters, immersed himself not only in the living flesh of human history but also in the painful darkness of the absence of every meaning. She did this to rekindle within it the light of hope.

It was in January 1944, as though for the first time in two thousand years of Christian history, that she discovered the hidden wound inflicted on Christ's soul when, nailed on the wood of the cross, he gave voice to the "why?" of every human being. He launched *this* anguished cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (see Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46). It is the same wound that in those years secretly attracted other men's and women's inner desires for justice and truth. I am thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edith Stein, Simone Weil, and Pavel Florenskij, to name just a few. They all experienced the ruthless cruelty, the consequences of that death of God that were poured out inevitably in the agony and death of humanity.

In the wound and the cry of Jesus, which contains all the wounds and cries that arise from "the reversal of history,"¹³ Chiara rediscovered not so much the center *toward which* to turn her gaze but rather the center *from which* to open her eyes to a vision capable of starting history afresh. Just a few years after the end of World War II, in the summer of 1949,¹⁴ she wrote a passage where

13. The formula expresses the story of suffering, injustice, and misery of many from which, all too often, was built and is still built the story of success, promise, and wealth of a few. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

14. On the meaning of the summer of 1949 in Chiara's story and that of the Focolare, we see in particular the fruit of the work of the Abba School in publishing Chiara's original writing from those times along with commentaries by Abba School members in *Clartias: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 2 (2013): 4–31. This event is narrated, in a full synthesis, by Chiara herself in the story published in *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1 (2012): 5–12.

she described the *focus* of this new vision of reality with clarity and force:

I have only one Spouse on earth: Jesus Forsaken. I have no other God but Him. In Him there is the whole of Paradise with the Trinity and the whole of the earth with humanity.¹⁵

Here is the center!

It is found again in that it was freely received and resolutely embraced by Chiara. When she wrote these words, she had just finished living through an intense period of light (in the summer of 1949) where she had contemplated and lived in her heart the wonders of God's plan of love for the whole of humanity revealed to her by Jesus and shared with her companions. Then, in returning to everyday life, she saw the new life and light born from the love of God for humanity concentrated in Jesus, who on the cross suffered forsakenness to the very depths, thereby identifying himself with each person whatever their situation. It is passing through *this* wound, together with every other person, that a new human history begins to unfold. It is not by chance that the one to accompany her on this "divine adventure," in those key years of postwar moral and civil reconstruction, was a man of a vast and open culture, a man of conviction and generous political action, namely, Iginio Giordani.¹⁶

15. Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings: Spirituality, Dialogue, Culture* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007), 95.

16. For a brief but rigorous and well-documented introduction, see Tomaso Sorgi, *Giordani: Segno di tempi nuovi* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1994). Nor can we forget the decisive contribution that, starting from those years, Pasquale Foresi would give to the

Chiara, therefore, had found the center in which to dwell. But it was not a calm retreat or an impenetrable fortress. Rather, it was a tent open to pilgrims, destined to welcome in whoever thirsts for truth and hungers for justice. The wound of the Forsakenness is a term new and original to Chiara and is a “sign of the [new] times” beginning to appear.¹⁷ It was for Chiara the point of entry to the house where all can live freely. By together crossing the threshold of the experience of love received, returned, and generously spread everywhere, people can experience the conviviality and joy of a reconciled life. They regain hope and re-find meaning and direction in life. Because of its inner roots in the Spirit of God, coupled with an original “unchurchy” and non-ideological approach that addresses the various issues of the human condition, the charism of unity opens hearts and minds to a vision where *all* can feel at home. This includes those who are in any way wounded and marginalized by the harsh trials of life and the heartless processes of history. It is a vision shared by *all together* on the basis of their living tradition’s experience and thought.

In the wound of the Forsaken One is summed up the history of humanity and of civilizations in their immense diversity and in the magnificence and drama of actual events, not only *diachronically*, in history’s unfolding over time, but also *synchronically*, in the dialogical encounters, in the exchanges, and in the synergy to which the many expressions of human experience are called.

incarnation of the charism of unity. He, like Giordani, was considered by Chiara to be a co-founder of the Focolare Movement.

17. See *The Cry of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001). For a biblical understanding, Gerard Rossé, “Entry into the Paradise of ’49 and Biblical Revelation,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 2 (2012): 4–21. For a theological understanding, see Stefan Tobler, *Jesu Gottverlassenheit als Heilsergebnis in der Spiritualität Chiara Lubichs* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003).

Jesus Forsaken is for Chiara the face *before which* and the space *in which* people can re-find themselves as part of a mutual relationship with every other person. He is, for her, the Teacher¹⁸ of that full dialogue that Pope Paul VI proclaimed with prophetic vigor in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964). There, he proposed the following to the conscience of humanity as the imperative and the *immense opportunity* of our time:

The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make. (n. 67)

Indeed, the whole history of man’s salvation is one long, varied dialogue, which marvellously begins with God and which He prolongs with men in so many different ways. In Christ’s “conversation” with men, God reveals something of Himself, of the mystery of His own life, of His own unique essence and trinity of persons. At the same time He tells us how He wishes to be known: as Love pure and simple; and how He wishes to be honoured and served: His supreme commandment is love. (n. 72)

Wherever men are striving to understand themselves and the world, we are able to communicate with them. (n. 101)

For it becomes obvious in a dialogue that there are various ways of coming to the light of faith and it is possible to make them all converge on the same goal. However

18. Above all, see the penetrating essays of G. M. Zanghì, *Gesù Abbandonato maestro di pensiero* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2008).

divergent these ways may be, they can often serve to complete each other. They encourage us to think on different lines. They force us to go more deeply into the subject of our investigations and to find better ways of expressing ourselves. It will be a slow process of thought, but it will result in the discovery of elements of truth in the opinion of others and make us want to express our teaching with great fairness. It will be set to our credit that we expound our doctrine in such a way that others can respond to it, if they will, and assimilate it gradually. (n. 86)

Chiara, during that decisive summer of 1949, wrote:

To welcome the All into self, it is necessary to be nothing like Jesus Forsaken. And on nothing all can write. . . . It is necessary to place ourselves in front of all in a position to learn, for we do need to learn in reality. And only nothing welcomes all into self and draws tightly to self everything in unity. It is necessary to be *nothing* (Jesus Forsaken) in front of every brother or sister to draw ourselves tightly to *Jesus* in the other: “Whatever you have done to the least of my brothers, you have done to me.”¹⁹

In a word, Chiara discovered in Jesus Forsaken a surprising metaphor that seems to sum up the intuition of the charism:

[T]he pupil of God’s eye open upon the world: an Infinite void through which God looks at us: the window of God

opened wide upon the world, and the window through which we see God.²⁰

In Chiara’s intuition, our view of the world insofar as it is correct, beautiful, and productive is born from God’s view of us. Jesus Forsaken is its form and *focus*. This is because we are dealing with a view (the eye) that passes through the emptiness of self²¹ (the pupil) to welcome the other and be regenerated together with the other in love.

But this is not only a religious or spiritual intuition. Rather, it is the principle and the *theor-ethical*²² key that is doctrinal and practical at the same time. It is the key to an amazing ferment of cultural renewal that is offered and proposed to us.²³ It is a matter of looking to God (for believers), to the human person and the cosmos (for everyone), with the eyes with which Jesus looks at them in his forsakenness: that is, from and in that unconditional and infinite love that is “the” life and “the” destiny of us all. Fascinating, unforeseen future prospects thus emerge. They respond to the nostalgia that can be found in every genuine culture urging it towards the attainment, achieved with huge effort and foretasted in history, of the goal to which we all aspire. Indeed, I recently heard at the Sophia University Institute a student from a war-torn

20. Chiara Lubich, Unpublished Writing, August 28, 1949.

21. Such an “emptying of oneself” recalls the *kenosis* (emptying) that the apostle Paul refers to in the letter to the Philippians (2:7) to describe the act with which the Son of God stripped himself of his equality with God to become in all aspects similar to humans and to thus share with them, through this poverty, his richness (2 Cor 8:9).

22. See Adriano Fabris, *TeorEtica: Filosofia della relazione* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2009).

23. An account of it is given in the book referred to above, that is, a compendium of some of Chiara’s most significant writings: Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings*.

19. Chiara Lubich, Unpublished Writing, August 1949.

country say, “Certain things can be seen only by eyes that have cried.” Indeed. The prospects that the window of Jesus forsaken opens before us are of a different vision, one that is performative. It welcomes and transforms what it perceives and contemplates in the tears it shares with those who weep and in the longings of those who search.

This vision contemplates God, in the first place, as the One who is all and always *agape*.²⁴

Agape here means a gift and communication of Self so that the other can be and become fully what the other is. This, for Chiara, is the deep meaning enclosed in faith in a God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Contemplating God as a Trinity of love means not only that God says with deeds, “*it is absolutely good for the other to be*,”²⁵ but also that he wants the other to become, in a freely given gift, “*his or her other self*.” God, in Chiara’s intuition, is the first to live with human beings the key commandment he gave us: “love your neighbour *as yourself*.” This is precisely because God is Love, and to love is to want *to raise the other to the same level as oneself*²⁶—into the freedom and the joy of sharing all one is and all one has.

24. See Marisa Cerini, *God Who is Love in the Experience and Thought of Chiara Lubich* (New York: New City Press, 1992).

25. As noted by Hans Urs von Balthasar in his *Theo-drama*, Vol. V (Milan: Jaca Book, 1996), 70.

26. “Everything that God does,” explains Chiara in an unpublished document on Paradise ’49, “is a perfect work, perfect as God, therefore Trinitarian, which means: Loving, that is, to bring our neighbour, the other person to the same level as oneself, by communicating oneself to the other.” About this passage, she commented: “Love, in fact, can only be Trinitarian.”

This is the life of God, the Trinity of love,²⁷ communicated to the world in Jesus forsaken. We can look at people, at history, at the cosmos with this vision and in all discern and advance the grammar and the syntax of *this* love. This is a love that is human and social, a love that lives and grows within the rhythm of Trinitarian love. It is a love that loves, is loved, and makes us one in that life, which is freedom and joy. It is a love that still loves where meaning has been lost, distorted, even rejected—precisely where relationships have been damaged by conflict, indifference, or hatred. For God himself, in his Son who shared the human condition to the point of his cry of forsakenness, immersed himself in our condition, in everything so as to rekindle meaning and life.

All this is true even though what it provokes and often demands can only be believed in and hoped for with trust and perseverance, even as we do not see it accomplished in fact and cannot guess how and when it will happen. Chiara once wrote:

27. For an illustration of Chiara’s Trinitarian vision at its roots in the dogmatic and theological tradition and in the ray of light traced out by the great charisms, see my essay: “L’esperienza e l’intelligenza della fede in Dio Trinità: Da Sant’Agostino a Chiara Lubich,” *Nuova Umanità* 167 (2006): 527–52. A summary of my arguments appears in *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1 (2012): 15–16. This essay developed into *Dio che dice Amore: Lezioni di teologia* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2007); *Dalla Trinità: L’avvento di Dio tra storia e profezia* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011); and *La Trinità e il destino d’Europa* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2013). In this regard, of particular interest is the work of Klaus Hemmerle, who took part in the Abba School since its inception, from *Tesi di ontologia trinitaria: Per un rinnovamento della filosofia cristiana* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1986) to his last book, published posthumously, *Partire dall’unità: La Trinità come stile di vita e forma di pensiero* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1998); and Giuseppi Maria Zanghì, *Dio che è Amore: Trinità e vita in Cristo* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1991). Worthy of attention is the fact that the great social encyclical of Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), published to commemorate the *Populorum Progressio* of Paul VI, indicates in the mystery of the Trinitarian God the *focus*, in the Christian vision, of that “new thrust in thinking” necessary today to face the crisis of the current world, revealing a utilizable horizon of transformation (ns. 54–5).

I felt that I was created as a gift for the person next to me and the person next to me was created by God as a gift for me. Just as the Father in the Trinity is everything for the Son and the Son is everything for the Father. On earth all is in a relationship of love with all: each thing with each thing. It is necessary to be Love to find the golden thread that links beings.²⁸

The humanism to which we all aspire is expressed in these simple words full of light.

What we have to do is wake up and make effective in historical praxis the logic of gift that dwells in our consciences and enlightens our minds. It is this logic that makes us men and women who are responsible for each other in the concreteness of social, cultural, economic, and political life. And all the time we must keep our attention on the “who” of each person in his or her extraordinary dignity and extraordinary destiny.

In Jesus’ vision, this is the humanism of “on earth as it is in heaven.” In the “Our Father,” which he gave to his disciples (see Mt 6:10), he invites us to ask for this humanism with trust and to pursue it with determination. It is a humanism that, in the wonder of the gift received in this way, builds up through human acts and time not only the *interior castle*, which cares for and contemplates the presence of God in the heart of the individual, but it also

28. See Callan Slipper, “Toward an Understanding of the Human Person According to the Mystical Experience of Chiara Lubich in the Paradise of ’49,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1 (2012): 29.

builds up the *exterior castle*,²⁹ in which “love that is true and truth that is love” comes to live not only in the heart of *each one of us*, but also *among us*, as men and women who believe in the greatness of our common destiny.

Certainly, and Chiara was aware of this, such a faith becomes incarnate in the here and now of the unfinishedness and provisionality that characterize the course of our lives, with their ever-present tentativeness and riskiness in time. And these lives, for the one who believes, are accompanied by the presence of the love of the Father and destined, in Jesus, to conclude in “new heavens and new earth.”

The course of our lives asks of all of us not so much to *manage* what we are and live and do but to *generate* it together with others. This means to give birth in reciprocity of intentions and action, step-by-step, meeting after meeting, project after project, to the growth of each one of us, excluding none, into the mature and perfect stature of the complete Person (see Eph 4:13). And this, according to the charism of unity of which Chiara became

29. The expression is from Chiara herself and already appears in her writings of 1949. It recalls the symbol of the “interior castle” that Teresa of Avila used to describe the mysticism aimed at collecting within one’s soul—aptly seen as an “interior castle”—the presence of God Trinity promised by Jesus (Jn 14:23). With the symbol of the “exterior castle,” Chiara intends to express the originality of the mysticism that is proper to the charism of unity where God Trinity does not come to dwell only in the soul of each one, but among those who, also according to Jesus’ promise, are united in His name (Mt 18:20). Chiara explains that this unity extends from the God in oneself to the God in the neighbor. This has important implications on the cultural and social levels. On this subject, see Chiara’s own meditation, “A Spirituality of Communion,” in *Essential Writings*, 31–2. See also the dense synthesis by Zanghi, “*Il castello esteriore*,” *Nuova Umanità* 26 (2004): 371–76; and the essays by Jesús Castellano Cervera, *Il castello esteriore: Il “nuovo” nella spiritualità di Chiara Lubich*, ed. Fabio Ciardi (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011).

for us the incomparable interpreter and guide, is *the style and the work of Mary*. She gave her body and her life to the seed of a new humanity.

Piero Coda received his doctorate at the Pontifical Lateran University where he went on to be full professor of theology. He was president of the Italian Theological Association from 2003 to 2011 and secretary prelate of the Pontifical Academy of Theology from 2003 to 2008. He is presently a member of the Abba School and President of the Sophia University Institute. The author of many publications, his most recent book is Pensare la trinitá: Filosofia europea e orizzarte, (2013), written with Dona Massimo.