

Chiara Lubich: Inaugural Speech of Sophia Analysis and Interpretation

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Abstract: *The author gives an extended analysis and commentary on Chiara Lubich's inauguration talk, focusing on its inspiring intuition, its central message, its fundamental contents, and its cultural and academic significance. He situates the talk within the long tradition of Christian cultural development and gives special attention to the ambition of this university to "teach wisdom."*

1. The subject of this paper is the address with which Chiara inaugurated the Institute of Higher Learning (*Istituto Superiore di Cultura* or ISC) on August 15, 2001. The Institute came about through the collaboration of an international team of professors

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and scholars invited by Chiara ten years earlier to participate in a working group that she named the *Scuola Abbà* (Abba School), where the spiritual and cultural legacy of the charism of unity could be studied. ISC was the immediate precursor and incubator for the Sophia University Institute, established by the Pontifical Congregation for Catholic Education on December 7, 2007. In this article, I will offer an interpretation and analysis of that speech, to uncover and highlight its inspiring intuition, its central message, its fundamental contents, and its cultural and academic significance.¹ In the future, all these themes, obviously, will have to be revisited and studied further.

Chiara's address contains two parts, as well as a brief introduction and a conclusion. In the first part, Chiara relates the foundational experience of the Focolare Movement: the "pact of unity" of July 16, 1949, with Igino Giordani (Foco). From it sprang a period of intense mystical light known in the Focolare Movement as "Paradise '49."² The second part presents the "idea" of a university that, according to Chiara, springs from this event. According to her, the founder of the Focolare, such a university is inextricably connected with this pact. It has come about as an effect of it, and its specific fruits proceed from it.

My analysis reveals the talk's precise structure, with six points in the first part and five in the second. The meaning and importance of this text lies in the fact that—in Chiara's understanding—the

1. The address also includes excerpts from some informal conversations concerning the Sophia University Institute in Autumn 2012. This paper includes most of these conversations in a colloquial style, paraphrased rather than quoted.

2. On this theme, see the compilation of papers edited by the Abba School, *Il Patto del '49 nell'esperienza di Chiara Lubich: Percorsi interdisciplinari* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2012).

university that she describes and inaugurates in this speech is a consequence of the event in 1949. This event laid the foundations for an experience of life and thought generated by the gospel of Jesus and actualized by his Spirit. It gives form to a renewed profile of the university that can be applied and put to practical use in wider and wider contexts.

2. In the introduction, Chiara refers to the inauguration of “the university which we feel the Lord wants.” This university, therefore, understood within the charism that Chiara represents, is willed by God; it is a response to an impulse of the Holy Spirit. She emphasizes that this university is, naturally, for young people. This is not only because young people are suited to studying but also because, as Chiara explains to the students she is addressing, “You—after the focolarini, of course—have been shown the first pages of Paradise ’49, which is the source, the origin of what must be our way of seeing, of knowing (as much as possible) what is created and what is the Uncreated.”³

With vigor, Chiara defines the event of ’49 as the “wellspring” and “origin” of “our way of seeing and of knowing.” “Seeing” and “knowing” mean different things. In the philosophical, spiritual, and theological traditions, “to see” (*visio*) means to intuit or grasp—that is, to touch with the hand, to know by experience. “To know,” instead, means to become aware of, to understand from within. The event of ’49, therefore, for Chiara is the wellspring and the paradigm of a specific way of experiencing and of intellectually penetrating the truth.

3. Chiara addresses the gen (New Generation), meaning the youth who adhere to the Focolare Movement; specifically, she refers to the fact that she had already begun to tell them (in the annual Congress of Gen at Castelgandolfo, 2000) about the beginning of Paradise ’49, introducing them to its fundamental significance for the lived experience of the charism of unity.

This distinction is particularly important. According to Chiara, what God wants to transmit to the church and humanity today through the charism of unity is not simply a way of living (a “spirituality”) but also an integral way of seeing and knowing (a “culture”). This is made clear in that for more than twenty years, Chiara established and collaborated closely with the spiritual and cultural workshop known as the Abba School. As far as I know, in the history of the great Christian spiritualities, this is unusual, even unique.

The object of such seeing and knowing is “the created and the uncreated.” From the Latin word *res* (“matter” or “thing”) is derived the Late Latin term *realis*, “actual,” reflected in the contemporary English term “reality.” In the Christian tradition, “reality” has two expressions: the created and the uncreated. The uncreated is God; the created is the world. Perceiving reality, therefore, is a matter of seeing and knowing God and the world, or better still, the world and God, because first we know the world in the light of God, and then God himself, when he reveals himself. Thus, the world is known in its true reality only from God and in God.

Chiara addresses young people. She speaks of a privilege—that is, a precious gift that not all can yet enjoy—that they received in being informed of the event of ’49. It is a “privilege” for two reasons: first, because it is not based on any merit, and second, because, due to the circumstances of history (from which God is never absent), it was precisely they, the youth, who were called to participate in this way in the event of ’49.⁴

4. As we will soon see, communication is intrinsic to the event Chiara narrated, because in itself it is the fruit of a “pact,” in Jesus-Eucharist, between Chiara and Giordani and because its significance unfolds through Chiara’s communicating to Giordani what it evoked. In fact, it is an essentially interpersonal event with a universal actuality; as such, it is destined to be transmitted to all.

But why this privilege? Chiara does not explain. Rather, to be grasped, as she says, the *awesomeness* of the event must be renewed. It is as if she is saying: “I will let you listen to this account again, so that in the end you yourselves will intuit the reason.” At the end of the first part, having taken up the account again, she proceeds with energy and conviction: “Today (she is speaking on August 15, 2001; the narration refers to July 16, 1949) you must enter and be present in that small troop.” In the very act of being communicated and received, therefore, the event is actualized. The reality it made possible is replicated, albeit in a different way, in the presence of those who receive it. “Recalling” (*ricordo* in Italian), writes Chiara in a note from ’49, is in all truth *ri-cor-do*: (*dò al cuore di nuovo*) “I give to the heart again.”

We can ask ourselves: Why does Chiara retell this event to the young people in order to render it real? She does so because she lived it firsthand and is therefore its direct witness and because she is aware that it is a precious gift from God for all: an event that makes possible something new and important for the life of the church and for the story of humankind in the *kairos* of our time. In this respect, through the years, Chiara has been reassured by the recognition on the part of the Catholic Church and, in different ways, of other Christian churches that the work born out of the charism of unity is a genuine and providential experience of the gospel in our times.

Moreover, Chiara communicates it to young people because they are capable of being amazed—that is, of being fascinated and enkindled and, consequently, of deciding to live for a great ideal because they have the courage to act and take risks. As Plato and Aristotle affirm, “awe” (in Greek, *thaûma*) is the attitude from which philosophy is born: In its light every piece of knowledge and

every decision takes on the risk of a new experience and interpretation of the truth and of the transformation of historical reality.

In a word, the message (contained in the event of ’49 and now communicated) is for young people. The new world that these new times require and that can find inspiration in the event of ’49 is destined for them and is in their hands. In fact, this message is communicated to them (this emerges in the second part of the speech) not simply as a great ideal and fascinating dream but as a treasure to cultivate and a task to carry out. For this reason, it is transmitted through a school, more precisely and in a more challenging way, through a university—that is, a specific academic institution of cultural mediation and integral formation.

Therefore, this university is called to be a 360-degree school that allows its students to become aware of and to bring to life the originality that inspires it. That is, first and foremost, it is a school that immerses them in an encounter with God, in Jesus, from whom it was born. From that encounter, the students will begin to grasp and define the expressions and the cultural and social consequences of this event. In setting forth on a life of and commitment to study, which will entail different fields and professional pathways and encompass the various areas of knowledge and of human and social experience, they should be illuminated and informed by this newness and transform it into history.

This is the basic structure of the speech. We can summarize everything by saying that in Chiara’s vision (1) The event of 1949 creates a new way of seeing and knowing. (2) Through the young people, it can become the precious leaven of a new civilization. (3) To this end, it is necessary for the young people to be actors in this event, through training in a university, which, in its own way, must be the expression of the event. These young people must also

efficaciously communicate it by undertaking an adequate study and incarnation of the event at a cultural level, and consequently, at a social level.

3. Now, let us take a close look at the first part of the speech, wherein Chiara retells the event of '49, as she had on other occasions.⁵ She does so in six points, which comprise a brief outline.

a) The first is a sort of preface that summarizes the story of her relationship with God as she followed Jesus in the period before 1949, beginning with December 7, 1943, the day of her consecration to God: “Five years had passed since our Movement began and we had already understood and made our own several main points of its spirituality.”

b) Then a second point: “We were immersed in these thoughts and experiences when we decided to step away from the Movement for a while and go to the mountains for a rest.” Having established this, she passes to the immediate setting of the event: the mountains at Tonadico, in Val di Primiero (region of Trent), in the summer, for a period of rest.

c) A third point follows: “We were living these experiences when Foco came to the mountains.” “Foco” refers to Igino Giordani, who in the previous year had come to know Chiara and her experience in Rome.⁶ Giordani was a family man, a member of parliament, and a well-known writer in the Catholic world and beyond. The three aspects that delineate his figure are significant:

5. Compare, for example, the narration she offered in 1961: “Paradiso '49”, in *Nuova Umanità* 30 (2008/3): 177, 285–96; see also the version recounted to the Gen in December 2003, reproduced in *Unità e Carismi* 20 (2010/4).

6. This took place in his office at the Italian Parliament (Montecitorio) on September 17, 1948. The diocesan phase of Giordani's Cause of Beatification by the Holy See is ongoing.

a married man with children (while Chiara is consecrated to God in virginity and had companions [women and men] who shared her same state of life), a politician, and a cultured person. This fact is far from irrelevant. In fact, it is he who, with his question, stimulates the enkindling of the experience of grace from God, of which Chiara would be witness and protagonist. It is therefore the meeting of two persons with different vocations, each of whom put their lives in the hands of God, that is significant: one (Chiara) is immersed in God while staying in the world; the other (Foco) lives in the world with the desire to remain rooted always in communion with God.

From Foco's request arises the pact, which can be interpreted as God's inspiration, an inspiration that Chiara embraces. What is the basic significance of this pact? To leave completely in God's hands the realization of the relationship between Chiara and Foco and, by extension, among everyone. This relationship takes the form and measure of that unity among human beings that God had already brought about, in Jesus, once and for all, and it is the relationship that, in the course of history, he wants to communicate efficaciously to *all* (“Father, may they all be one as You and I are one” [see Jn 17:21], up to its perfect fulfillment (“so that God may be all in all” [1 Cor 15:28])).

d) Then Chiara moves on to describe the effect of the pact: unity is, in a word, to become/to be Jesus by grace (=to live in/of him) and through him to find oneself, dwelling with our brothers and sisters, in the bosom of the Father (*Abba*)—that is, to experience the love of the Father who makes us one in Jesus and to live in the Spirit [drawing] on this love. It is a real mystical experience, as can be seen from the framework and the progression of the narration, but it is wholly original: because it is born from a pact

of unity with a brother, in Jesus-Eucharist, and in everything and always—as we see at once—it is shared.⁷

e) The fifth point is marked by the *question* that Chiara asks Foco after the event: “Do you know where we are?” She herself gives the answer, communicating the new experience that is given her to live after the pact. In the first place, it is an entry into the Father (this is the “*where*”) and then an experience that is plural (“we are”). But the eyes of Foco’s soul must be opened to what the pact had realized: He is already inside, but he must become aware of it. In a certain way, Foco sees through Chiara’s eyes what God has brought about with/in the pact between them, in Jesus-Eucharist. Communication is a manifestation of the reality put in place by God, in Jesus, via the pact.

f) Immediately afterward, Chiara goes home and tells her companions what has happened, inviting them to go to church the next day to make the pact too. Thus, in the Father, she sees a “troop,” an orderly group of persons who walk in the bosom of the Father, who—as she herself will say—“travel Paradise” with her. Chiara emphasizes that the focolarine, on their part, as they listen with all openness to her account, also have the impression of “seeing” what is being narrated to them. The communication is perfect: Beginning from the pact, God has communicated himself to Chiara in Jesus, and Chiara communicates what she receives (what she becomes, in Jesus) to Foco and to her first companions. It is a communication that is not only verbal but also real and substantial.

How can this be possible? First, it is possible through the “nothingness of love” of Chiara and Foco, and later, of her first

7. Regarding the originality of this experience, see my book, *Dalla Trinità: L'avvento di Dio tra storia e profetia* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011), 493–509.

companions, in Jesus-Eucharist, who makes them enter and dwell in the bosom of the Father. Theirs is a “reciprocal” nothingness, which through Jesus is filled with God. And so, Jesus’ prayer: “On earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10) can be realized, “As You, Father, are in Me and I in you, may they also be one in us” (Jn 17:21). The paradigm of a new mysticism becomes the paradigm of a new social relationship. Becoming, through grace, one in Jesus “trinitizes”—as Chiara explains with an eloquent new word—those who are made participants of this One who is Christ. That is, each one is being “clothed” in Jesus, each put in a Trinitarian relationship with the other/others. Thus, each is one and distinct “just as” the Father and the Son are in the Holy Spirit, thus becoming an image of the Trinitarian life of love (this is precisely what Jesus asks of the Father in Jn 17:21).⁸

4. From here, we can pass to the second part of the speech: “Now let’s speak about the School.” Here, too, a brief outline, would contain at least five points: a) the aim and the object of the school, that is, to teach wisdom; b) the space (classroom) where the school must take place, namely, the bosom of the Father; c) the dynamics, that is, in a constitutive sense, the trinitarian relationship that should be established between professors and students; d) the conditions for taking part in it truly and fruitfully; and e) the pact in Jesus-Eucharist as the seal of everything.

Let us start by considering more fully the goal of the school, because in this, in a certain sense, consists its central and vital significance, on which all else depends. The goal of this school, in

8. For further study, see my talk “*Un carisma nella storia come sguardo dal centro*,” delivered at the International Convention entitled “Chiara Lubich: Carisma storia cultura,” Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, March 14, 2013, and *Dalla Trinità* (footnote 9).

fact its ultimate object, is wisdom. It is not for nothing that wisdom (in Greek, *Sophia*) is the name that Chiara (in 2002) gave to the University Institute that she founded. To illustrate what wisdom is, Chiara cites an excerpt from the renowned Dominican theologian, Raimondo Spiazzi,⁹ whom she came to know many years before. Spiazzi illustrates the meaning of wisdom by referring to Thomas Aquinas, who in turn cites Augustine and, generally, the precious heritage of the classical tradition.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that by firmly identifying wisdom as the school's objective, Chiara sets in motion a sort of peaceful revolution that leads the university back to its original inspiration. When we think of the university today, we think of a series of disciplines on a horizontal line, as it were, that relate to our experiences in the different academic fields: philosophy, politics, law, economics, art, and so on. She also brings about a reversal of perspective, one that moves from a horizontal perspective to a vertical perspective.¹¹ It is a question of changing both axis and intention, which, at their root, require the commitment of the professors and of the students. First, wisdom must be taught and learned, and only afterward the various disciplines; or better, the two things must

9. Raimondo Spiazzi, *Lo Spirito Santo e la vita cristiana* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1964), 229.

10. See, for example, Remi Brague, *La saggezza del mondo: Storia dell'esperienza umana dell'universo* (Soveria Mannelli, CZ: Rubbettino, 2005); Pierre Hadot, *Esercizi spirituali e filosofia antica* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005).

11. On this, see our "Learning outcomes e unità dei saperi," *Seminarium* 51 (2011/1): 85–97. Markus Krienke spoke about the importance and the urgency of "an epistemological reflection on the concept of wisdom in order to get out of the crisis" ("Indicazioni epistemologiche sul concetto di sapienza. Problematiche odierne e una rilettura della tradizione teologica," in *Plasmati dalla Sapienza. Un confronto biblico, antropologico e filosofico sull'attualità del libro della Sapienza*, ed. Laila Lucci and Natalino Valentini [Turin: Effatà Editrice, 2012]: 153–212, here 156).

go together, never one without the other. The various disciplines should be studied, but the horizon, the fount, and the ultimate end of everything should be wisdom.¹²

St. Augustine is among the first to distinguish between *sapientia* (the vertical coordinate) and *scientia* (the horizontal coordinate).¹³ For this doctor of the church, *sapientia* and *scientia* are each distinguished by their object: the object of the first concerns eternal realities, of the second, earthly and temporal realities. But the means of knowing are also different: eternal realities are known by the intellect, while earthly realities are known by reason.

12. This necessity of a radical reorientation is strongly felt after the era of the fathers of the church and of the Middle Ages, during the fulfillment of modernity, by great witnesses of sanctity and of Christian thought such as John Henry Newman and Antonio Rosmini. Regarding John Henry Newman, we refer to his *The Idea of the University*. Rosmini, instead, emphasized that during the early times of Christianity four characteristics made Christian thinking great: the uniqueness of knowledge, the communication of sanctity, the tradition of life, and the reciprocity of love. He asserts: "The foundation of the method which was used in the first centuries: knowledge and life closely united, and one being born from the other. Rather, in the truest sense it could be said that knowledge was born from sanctity, therefore knowledge was desired only for the love that it brought to sanctity; knowledge was desired because it was such that it contained sanctity in its innermost being; and so everything was unified: and in this unity strictly consists the genuine nature of the doctrine destined to save the world: it is not pure ideal doctrine, but practical truth; and therefore, if we remove sanctity from it, do you think the wisdom that Christ taught will remain?" (*Delle cinque piaghe della Santa Chiesa*, n 41; ed. A. Falle, Istituto di Studi Filosofici, Centro di Studi Rosminiani, in *Opere di Antonio Rosmini* [Rome: Città Nuova, 1981], 58–59). According to Rosmini, in modern times, a woeful separation of theory from practice has been established, while the Christian religion teaches that "we have to penetrate the truth with the soul," not only with the head, in order "to taste it with interior delight" and, therefore, as in the first centuries, also today we have to make "teaching [depend] not so much on books but on the living voice and the living presence" (*Delle cinque piaghe della Santa Chiesa*, n 39; 53–55).

13. See, for example, *De Trinitate* 12, 15, 25.

The intellect is like a fixed point (at the center) of the soul. It knows intuitively: It understands and grasps the truth in a profound and authentic light. Reason, instead, is the capacity to argue, that is, to converse, to pass from one point to another. It requires time and development. While the intellect grasps or, rather, is grasped by the light of Truth, reason converses and searches, guided by the same light. But at the beginning and at the end of the course of reason, there is the intellect, intuition, “vision.”

Therefore, for its object, wisdom has eternal reality and for its cognitive instrument the intellect. But wisdom and science, intellect and reason, are not two separate or parallel channels: they are the same thing, a two-sided medal. The intellect is the foundation and the goal of reason. First, there is intuition, then explanation and reasoning. We begin from intuition and arrive at intuition. The human person, in fact, is made for intuition, for vision, for rapidity: for “seeing.” Reason is the route for arriving home, but we are at home in vision. Karl Rahner writes: “The supreme and most total form of thinking is recollection. The most decisive word that a man can say is prayer.”¹⁴

In the Christian tradition, the object of wisdom, God, is the root, the foundation, the light of creation. I know things well and, ultimately, in truth when I know them in their relationship to their origin and their end. God is the horizon of knowledge of all reality. Thus wisdom, which makes me know God through the intellect that welcomes the light of his self-revelation, is the root of knowledge. If knowledge loses its relationship with wisdom, it loses its compass. But if wisdom is not incarnated in knowledge,

14. Karl Rahner, *Sendung und Gnade: Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1988), 146.

one goes nowhere. Therefore, there should be unity and distinction between wisdom and knowledge.

From this, St. Augustine concludes that Jesus is our Wisdom and our knowledge.¹⁵ Wisdom because he is the son of God, the Word of the Father. But also, knowledge, because he is true man. The New Testament also says this in its own way, although with a meaning different from Augustine’s, because the cultural context is different: “In Christ . . . are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2–3). Chiara, for her part, always emphasized that we are called to participate in “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16)—Christ who is the Word of God, and therefore Wisdom, and is true man, and therefore recapitulates in himself all human knowledge.¹⁶ Therefore, unity in distinction, without separation and without confusion. Trinitarian Unity.

From here, we can understand the description of wisdom proposed by Chiara. Starting from the experience of ’49, she wants to offer young people the concrete and practical possibility that wisdom will once again shed light on the human sciences. Today we no longer talk of science in the singular (as St. Augustine did), because in the modern age, there has been an explosion of “the

15. See *De Trinitate* 13, 19, 24.

16. Concerning the logo of the Institute of Higher Learning (ISC) (later revised, but with the same meaning, to become the logo of the Sophia University Institute), Chiara said: “Human knowledge . . . lifts itself up to the divine one . . . and they form only one knowledge . . . that of the mind of Jesus” (note of Eli Folonari, April 23, 2005). In this case, we refer to “divine knowledge,” meaning what, in another circumstance, Chiara herself defines as wisdom. For further reading, see the contributions offered by the group of systematic theologians in the two volumes edited by a group from the Abbà School: Piero Coda and Vincenzo Di Pilato, eds., *Teologia “in” Gesù*, (Rome: Città Nuova, Istituto Universitario Sophia, 2012); and Piero Coda, Julie Tremblay, and Alessandro Clemenza, eds., *Il nulla-tutto dell’amore. La teologia come sapienza del Crocifisso* (Rome: Città Nuova, Istituto Universitario Sophia, 2013).

sciences” (in the plural). In any case, the fact is that in the modern age, wisdom, in a certain way, has been lost. Humans fell in love with temporal realities, at the risk of forgetting the vertical axis of their experience and their vocation. Chiara’s challenge is to put these things back together. A university like the one that she founded has as its principle and vocation the reconnection of wisdom and science.

But let us look in detail at how Chiara describes wisdom. She starts by speaking of “the gift of wisdom.” Here is the first and fundamental idea. Wisdom is a gift that descends from above, from God. In reality, it is difficult to find something in life that is not a gift. For us, everything is a gift. But here, in this particular instance, what does Chiara wish to emphasize? Wisdom is not something we can conquer. You can, and you have to, conquer knowledge. Wisdom comes from a different dimension. It is not a fruit of conquest. The Christian tradition speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, wisdom being one of them. You can prepare yourself to receive it, but it never comes from you. In fact, wisdom is a quality of God. For this reason, it is a divine gift: only God is complete and inexhaustible wisdom (see Eph 3:10, which speaks of the “the wisdom of God in its rich variety,” variegated like a rainbow).

Thus, “The gift of wisdom puts the soul in contact with eternal realities. . . . It scrutinizes the depths of God and discerns its radiant beauty.” There is a superficial way of seeing: how many times do we look at things without seeing them! For example, we might cast a casual glance at a flower, but if we look at it with attention and love, we see it in a new way, so much so that in it we can grasp the mystery of the whole universe.

Thanks to wisdom, therefore, the soul “scrutinizes the depths of God.” God is infinite profundity. The expression comes from

St. Paul: “*tà bāt̄he toū Theoū*” (1 Cor 2:10), the depths, the abyss of God. This leads us to recall spontaneously the description of the moment when Chiara enters the bosom of the Father: “to the eyes of my soul . . . [God] appeared as an abyss that was immense, cosmic.” An abyss is a bottomless chasm. “It was all gold and flames”: These are the human archetypes of beauty, light, the Divine. “It was infinite, but I felt at home.” To feel at home in the infinite: What an extraordinary experience!¹⁷

So, when it makes itself known in wisdom the quality of truth is *beauty*. In fact, one exclaims: “This is beautiful!” When you say, “This is true,” you set the intellectual dimension in motion. When you say, “This is good, it is just,” you set the ethical dimension in motion. When you say, “This is beautiful,” you set your whole self in motion. It is not simply aesthetic beauty but, as the scholastics would say, transcendental beauty, an essential quality that expresses being as being, inasmuch, that is, as it is splendor of the love of God.

The soul, therefore, “sees what it cannot repeat and drinks from that inexhaustible spring, without ever being satisfied.” It is like quenching one’s thirst yet continuing to be thirsty. It is not an anguished thirst, but a thirst that expresses an ever livelier and more

17. We could compare this phrase to the description by other authors, especially of the recent past and contemporary times: “I go into the infinite and what do I see? The emptiness, and so I feel anguish because I see only darkness, nothingness.” So, says Leopardi, and this is what the deranged man of Nietzsche says in *The Joyful Wisdom*: “It is as if we have detached the earth from the sun.” The earth detached from the sun roams in an infinite darkness. “And it is darkness above, below, right and left, at the sides.” Instead Chiara says: “It was all gold and flames, above, below, right and left,” that is, the same experience as Nietzsche’s, but in the positive. What is this flame and this gold? It is love, experiencing the love of God that envelops and illumines. Chiara, being in God, sees love, only love. Nietzsche, a witness of contemporary humanity when it does not find love, is instead in emptiness and anguish.

ardent desire. In fact, the desire for God grows as it is being satisfied: the more it is satisfied, the more it grows. “As a deer longs for flowing streams” is the biblical image from Psalm 42.¹⁸

“But, having discovered and almost savored God”—we savor God, as we savor beautiful things! “With that light in my eyes I can now look at the world and see everything well.” Here is the transition from wisdom to knowledge. You have the light of God in your eyes and with that, you look at the world. And you can see things clearly. If you look at God, God reflects into your eyes that light with which you can look at the world and at all the realities that compose it as God sees them. In fact, I see clearly in the light of God because I see things in their reality and in their most profound vocation, as what God has created, expressions of his love called to become the created splendor of his love, in Jesus.

If God is love, then what is politics? It is the art of building the city according to a design of justice and fraternity. And what does economics become, if I see it with the eyes of wisdom? It becomes an economics of communion. This is only the intuition; then reasoning is necessary. We need to study and commit ourselves night and day, in the will of God, to build a kind of economics or politics like this, being aware of the contradictions of history, the difficulties, the failure, the obstacles, but always with the light of God in our eyes.

To look at the world with the light of God, in fact, is not exalting. It is crucifying. In fact, there is only one person who looked at the world with God’s eyes to the very end: Jesus. And how did he end up? On the cross, to the point of suffering the abandonment.

18. Ps 42:1–3: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?”

If we, too, look at the world with God’s eyes, sooner or later, in one way or another, we will end up on the cross. But here is true joy: to give one’s life to the very end for one’s friends.

“To see everything well,” therefore. But how? “Judging everything according to divine reasoning.” Here is reason and knowledge: judgment, discernment, criticism. It is absolutely necessary to reason out humanly but according to the logic of God. “Almost projecting onto everything—here is the task of the school—the light of God’s infinite gaze.” To project means to throw light onto an object, to illuminate it. Therefore, the task of this school, Chiara says, is to project the light of God onto everything—onto politics, economics, the human sciences, and so on.

“In the mind of the wise Christian the ideal order that is in the mind of God is, as it were, reconstructed”: Citing Spiazzi, here Chiara refers to the wise “Christian,” because she is talking to Christians, but it is valid for all. In the mind of God, there is an ideal order; everything is articulated and happens according to a divine logic. This order is reconstructed, in another way, the human way, in the mind of the person who studies politics, economics, and so on.

And what is reconstructed? “The unfolding of eras and of ages, the succession and the interlocking of events, the flow of history.” In a word, we discover the golden thread of the evolution of the created world and of human history. That is, one understands why this thing or that thing came to be: the Old Testament, the New Testament, but also Buddha, Marx, and so on. One understands a little. That is, one has an intuition of the meaning of things, the interlocking of events, the development of history.

Thus, “everything is seen in its relationship, one of dependence and of convergence, to a divine design.” Everything that happens,

that develops, that is asked of us, is seen in its relationship of dependence on and convergence toward a single design of love. It is a matter of dependence and convergence because everything is born from love (God's love) and is directed toward love (who is God), even when, humanly speaking, it seems to be the contrary. Jesus' death on the cross, for example, seems to be the opposite of love: Instead, it is the center of God's love, its culminating point. And this happens "with God's own mental synthesis." Wisdom makes it possible for the mental synthesis of God himself to enkindle and mature in humanity, in the sense that it makes the human person understand things in the light of God, seeing everything in the Word and loving it in the Spirit.

Love and knowledge become, ultimately, the same thing: you love by knowing, and you know by loving. This is the synthesis of Sophia: life and study, which means, precisely, that you know by loving, and you love by knowing. This is the chain reaction between study and life. Knowing by loving, loving by knowing. But the root of everything is love.

5. From here, let us cast a quick glance at the other characteristics of this school as Chiara delineates them. In the first place, the method: How is wisdom acquired? Chiara outlines four ways: "We can obtain Wisdom (1) by asking God for it; (2) by loving God and our neighbor; (3) by loving Jesus Forsaken; (4) by putting Jesus in our midst." A word about each one of these ways.

Prayer is the first way, because Wisdom is a gift of God; therefore, it is based upon putting yourself in relationship with God and asking him for it. The Psalm says: "You desire truth in the inmost being: therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart" (Ps 51:8). We must desire wisdom and therefore ask for it from the only one who can give it. This is how it is stated in Solomon's prayer for wisdom:

O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy,
who have made all things by your word,
and by your wisdom have formed humankind
to have dominion over the creatures you have made,
and rule the world in holiness and righteousness,
and pronounce judgement in uprightness of soul,
give me the wisdom that sits by your throne,
and do not reject me from among your servants.
For I am your servant, the son of your servant-girl,
a man who is weak and short-lived,
with little understanding of judgement and laws;
for even one who is perfect among human beings
will be regarded as nothing without the wisdom that
comes from you. (W's 9:1–6)

In tune with the spirituality of unity, Chiara emphasizes that such prayer is fully effective when it is communitarian and, that is, when it is entrusted to the Father by Jesus who is living in the midst of his own: "If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Mt 18:19).

The second way is to love God and neighbor. To love God means loving him with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength (see Mk 12:30). Therefore, we should also love God with all our mind! If we do not also exercise the mind, we do not love God completely. And then, to love the other as ourselves because, Chiara explains, "loving others brings light."¹⁹

19. We should note that in the Christian tradition—I'm thinking particularly of St. Thomas Aquinas, among others—wisdom is that gift of the Holy Spirit "quod respondet caritati" (*S. Th.*, IIa-IIae, q. 45 pr), one that corresponds to the theological virtue of charity.

The third way is to love Jesus Forsaken. Chiara explains this by citing Article 64 of the General Statutes of the Work of Mary, noting that we embrace Jesus' cross and abandonment "so that the presence of the Risen Lord may shine forth in their hearts, bringing with it the gifts of the Spirit," among which is wisdom. The text is concise and allusive. It presupposes the whole vision of Jesus Forsaken that arises from the charism of unity. In this case, what Chiara intends to highlight is that, on the foundation of faith and baptism, the Risen Jesus shines in us precisely through embracing Jesus Forsaken: that is, to make ourselves one with him in all the trying and difficult situations of life, in such a way as to transcend every obstacle with and in him, and experience the presence of the Risen One and of his Spirit poured out in the gifts of life, peace, and light (wisdom).

Finally, the fourth way: "by putting Jesus in our midst." This is a typical experience that springs from the charism of unity. Again, citing Article 64 of the statutes, Chiara reminds us that members of the Work of Mary "are to strive to be united among themselves, so that Christ who is present where there is mutual love may enlighten their thoughts and minds." Indeed, putting Jesus in our midst, according to the evangelical art of loving that emerges from the charism of unity, means reliving the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (see Lk 24:13–35), when the risen Jesus renders himself present in the midst of his own, as he had promised (see Mt 18:20), and enlightens them with his gifts through the Holy Spirit. Jesus, alive and risen, therefore, is the fire of light and love that burns among those who, gathered in his name, seek the truth, which is Jesus himself. This is marvelously suggested by the 7th Letter of Plato,²⁰ a text of extraordinary prophecy. Chiara

20. See Emanuele Pili, "La Lettera VII di Platone: comunanza di vita e persuasione come luogo della verità," *Sophia* 3 (2011/2), 257–78.

points out: "In this school, this, above all, will be the way to obtain wisdom: with Jesus in your midst."

Having described the four ways to obtain the gift of wisdom, Chiara concludes: "And if you learn other subjects, such as philosophy, theology, economics, science, medicine, politics, and so on., they cannot but be imbued with wisdom." But where is this school to be held? What is its classroom? Chiara aims high: What could be the true, ideal classroom for a school of this kind? "I have no doubts," she replies. "The classroom that guarantees the wisdom we want is one alone: the bosom of our Father in heaven, where we must be worthy to enter and dwell. The charism that has been given to us makes this possible."

Therefore, according to what Chiara specifies, it is a matter of "entering" into and "dwelling" in "the Bosom of our Father." The reference to her narration of what she experienced in the pact of '49 is more than evident. In fact, as the New Testament testifies, the "place" into which the crucified and risen Jesus introduces the disciples, who by grace were made only one thing with Him, is precisely the bosom of the Father.²¹ "I in them," Jesus prays, "and you in me, so that they may become completely one" (Jn 17:23). Therefore, if the disciples, being one in Jesus, are united among themselves, they live in the Father, in other words, they are enveloped and penetrated by his love. They find themselves "at home" in him. This "place" becomes the point of departure for living, thinking, and acting.

Because of the experience she had, and through the gift of light and love that she received, Chiara is certain that the charism of unity "permits" us (that is, it teaches us by offering us its ways

21. On the ontological significance of this "place," which is specifically Christological and therefore Trinitarian, see "What is the Trinitarian ontology?" in *Sophia* 4 (2012/2), 59–170.

and instruments) to “enter” into the bosom of the Father and dwell there, that is, to make this typical situation of existence into which Jesus has introduced us the dwelling place of our life. His exact place is the “classroom” of that school that, according to the inspiration of the charism, is called to teach wisdom, bringing about the effective and communitarian reception of this gift in the heart and in the mind.²²

22. St. John of the Cross, doctor of the church, in his characteristic mystical perspective, uses these terms to describe how wisdom is achieved by a soul that has let God purify its faculties by passing through the “emptiness” of the “dark night”: “The soul is already in the state of contemplation; it has gone out of the conversational phase. . . . It is already God who acts in her and bridles her interior powers, removing every support from the intellect, every taste from the will and every reasoning from the memory. . . . Now God starts to reveal Himself to the soul, not by means of the senses, as before; not through conversational activity, which composes and puts order on ideas; but through the pure spirit, in which reasoning is not developed. He communicates Himself to the soul in an act of simple contemplation” (*La notte oscura*, cap. 9, nn 7–8). In this text, the transition from the level of conversational rationality to that of intellectual contemplation to gain access to wisdom is clear. The mystical doctor explains that this happens through the purification and the self-deprivation of the faculties (memory, intellect, and will) in their conversational exercise: In this way, God himself, through the Incarnate Word and in his Spirit, can communicate himself to the center of the soul. In the spiritual way brought about by the charism of unity, Chiara explains, this happens through the mutual gift of oneself, in love, which we are called to live in order to gain access, together, to contemplation of the truth. The purification and self-deprivation that comes about in this way, in fact, are no less profound and radical; moreover, because they happen in an interpersonal relationship lived in Christ, they open the space to his living presence among those who are united in his name (see Mt 18:20). In a passage from 1949, Chiara illustrates this concept in a significant way:

Jesus Forsaken, because he is not, is. We are, if we are not. If we are, we are not. We must be “without a thought” because we are children of God. The children of God do not have thoughts. Only when we do not have thoughts will our mind be totally open and constantly receive God’s Light and be a channel. Likewise, we must be without will so as to be capable of God’s will. And without memory so as to remember only the present moment and live

c) Furthermore: what are the dynamics, the basic pedagogy, if you like, of this school? The teacher of this school is not the group of professors: It is Jesus in the midst of his own. In fact, the professors are at the service of this one teacher, who, because of mutual love and love toward all, lives among the professors, and among the professors and the students. Each one must do his or her part, but the teacher is Jesus in the midst. One really experiences this. For example, as a professor, I experience that the lessons are not conducted by me alone. While giving the lessons, I often learn something new. I owe this, first of all, to the students’ listening. Thanks to this listening, Jesus the Teacher makes himself present and I, too, learn from him. Mutual listening becomes the space for listening to wisdom, which, as a gift, is poured out into hearts and minds by the risen Jesus. The professor teaches, speaks, but his or her speaking and teaching are the fruit of listening to wisdom, which, as a source of living water, springs forth from the risen Jesus, alive in the midst of those who together make of themselves the *locus* of his presence.

“But if the only Teacher is Jesus among all,” Chiara explains, “the lessons will not be given only by the professors. . . . You will

“ecstatically” (outside ourselves). Without flights of imagination so as to see Paradise also with the imagination, because Paradise is the Dream of dreams.

And in a footnote Chiara comments: “What is asked is detachment from our way of thinking, from thinking itself. This is the non-being of the mind. This is what makes us like Jesus Forsaken. And this is true also for our will, our memory, our imagination. We achieve deaths like these above all by loving, by making God’s will ours and loving others, but also by ‘losing,’ when we are tempted to hold on to our own will, our own thought, and so on. It is rather like the highest poverty of the mind of St. Francis, the saint who, with his highest poverty, reached the point now reached by unity.” This dynamic, with reference to the experience lived in the university born out of the charism of unity, is illustrated by Chiara herself further on, in the same speech that we are commenting on.

do your part too.” The students are in school not simply to listen to the lessons but to build the lessons together with the professors. The students’ part “consists in the questions that the presence of Jesus in your midst will arouse in you, and also in your specific contributions.” In this way, the lesson will consist not only in listening but also in the students’ questions. Therefore, they should not be afraid to ask questions but should pose them if they feel aroused by the Holy Spirit and thereby can be a help and a contribution for all. A school of wisdom also means learning how to ask the right questions at the right time.

Chiara adds: “Besides asking questions, however, you must also give your own contribution. Most of you are university students pursuing in-depth studies in various fields of knowledge. Because of the presence of Jesus in the midst, it could happen that something the professor says sets off a light in you regarding a particular aspect of the discipline to which you are dedicated.” This is really true. I have experienced it many, many times. In the context of wisdom, when students of a certain discipline listen to the lessons of another (in my case, for example, theology), they perceive by intuition something regarding their own, illuminating an aspect of it. If they communicate this intuition, it can be evaluated and become, with time and proper elaboration, an authentic contribution. At Sophia, more than a few research projects and even some theses were generated in this manner.

“Thus, you will find yourselves becoming, as Jesus desires, all equal, brothers and sisters.” This is the trinitarian relationship established through mutual love among professors and students. It is not a matter of a uniform, undifferentiated equality, precisely because it is a “trinitarian” relationship, like the one that takes place between the Father and the Son in the Most Holy Trinity. “The

professors,” Chiara explains, “[will be] like the Father, and you like Son. Therefore, you have to allow yourselves to be ‘generated’ by them, but you must also respond with your love.” The professor, therefore, is called somehow to take the part of the Father, the one who gives; and the students should allow themselves to be “generated,” in the sense that the professor, if he or she lives this very presence of God, communicates wisdom, so that it regenerates students internally and edifies them.

d) To enter this classroom and live the dynamics of the relationships brought about by the active presence of the Only Teacher, students must conform their choice and lifestyle to specific conditions, which Chiara qualifies as indispensable. First of all, *to live the Word*: because, as she says, it is the only way to gain access to Paradise, to the bosom of the Father. Chiara emphasizes that this is each student’s personal contribution. Truly, for Chiara the concept of the Word and of living it, or rather, of “letting the Word live us” is deeply significant. In the logic of Christian revelation, in fact, each of us is from eternity a word in the Word, a word thought of, loved, and pronounced by the Father in his one and only Word who is the Son, the Word (*Verbum*). It is a divine logic in which all his words are gratuitously pronounced, as a gift, and are freely to be taken up and returned. In a text of 1949, Chiara writes: “The Father says: ‘Love’ in infinite tones and begets the Word, who is love, within himself, the Son, and the Son as the Son is, echo of the Father, says ‘Love’ and returns to the Father!” Well: we are a word in the Word in the sense that we are one of the “infinite tones” in which the Father says only one thing, what he is and what we are called to be: “love.” Our vocation, therefore, is to clothe with our humanity (and that is, with the existence that we live out, with our destiny discovered and responsibly carried out

in time, with our mission creatively executed) the particular word “love” that we are in Jesus. Thus, we can be, in him and with him, from this moment on, in the Bosom of the Father.

This vision of Chiara has a universal breadth, that is, it discloses something valid for everyone since it flows from the being that we are, in God. In philosophical language, we could say that each of us is a unique and unrepeatable perspective of the truth, which we are called upon to grasp, giving it life through our freedom and responsibility. For this reason, it is necessary to nourish ourselves with the truth expressed in the words of wisdom, spoken, in every time and place, by humanity. If we are not persistently and concretely in tune with this wavelength, we cannot walk together in the adventure of the truth, nor can we dwell, in a real way, in the *locus* where truth offers itself to us, ever new and ever more fully.

There is still another indispensable contribution that Chiara specifies (this time in a communitarian context): to live Jesus Forsaken, namely, to live the nothingness of oneself as a condition for putting mutual love into practice. In fact, for students and professors to love one another, it is necessary that the students be “empty,” that they might receive everything the professors say and give. And to be able to offer, in their turn, their questions and inputs, the students must “empty themselves” of these questions and inputs and contribute them. Chiara explains this in a stupendous way: “Love Jesus Forsaken, making yourselves empty to receive what the professors say, love Jesus Forsaken emptying yourselves to give what you have to the others; this is your way to love collectively together with the professors.” The professors, from their perspective, are to do the same.

This, therefore, is the logic of the gift required to animate the relationship between the students and the professors. The “emptiness” and “the emptying of oneself” about which Chiara speaks

indicate the profundity and radicality of love with which the students, for example, are called to accept the word of the professors and offer their own creative contributions. The gift of a thing, in fact, is true and real insofar as it is a gift of oneself. That is, we are each to make room in ourselves for the other (here is the “emptiness”) and to offer freely, without ulterior motives, what one has, what one is, to the point of no longer considering it exclusively one’s own (here is the “emptying of oneself”). Only in this way can an authentic and fruitful communication of and in the truth be realized.

In this same perspective, Chiara defines as an “ultra-necessary” condition “nourishing yourselves with the Eucharist.” In fact, the Eucharist, which communicates the life of Jesus substantially—that is, fully and really, his filial being—makes us one among ourselves in him and brings us into the bosom of the Father. Obviously, this condition is true for those who believe in Jesus, for those who are Christians. But this should not make us forget a universal fact: that the highest and most concrete moment in which wisdom communicates itself to humans and is shared among them is the “banquet”—the great metaphor that expresses the call to friendship and sharing among all.

It is in the *convivium* (think of Plato) that the dialogue in which wisdom among us becomes substantial, so to speak, and becomes nourishment for our life. The word thus becomes bread, as happened for the disciples, with Jesus, on the way to Emmaus (see Lk 24:13–35). The word becomes food that is shared, that nourishes us and makes us grow together in the Truth.

e) Finally, Chiara concludes, it is necessary for everyone, professors and students alike, to formulate the “pact of unity” in the morning before beginning class. Thanks to this pact, the Bosom of the Father opened itself to Chiara and Foco and, in unity with

them, to all those who live the gift and the light of the charism of unity. And therefore, thanks to this pact, each can renew daily his or her intention at school and can welcome this gift and travel, in unity, along the paths traced out by wisdom. In this way, at the same time each can go ahead in the demanding and exalting commitment of building with all the others (companions with companions) the contribution of the different disciplines in order to build the new civilization of truth and love.

The pact, in truth, is not an esoteric or elitist act, a sort of secret bond linking the members of a sect. Far from it! It is an open commitment in which each bears witness to his or her free involvement, without ulterior motives, in an adventure that envisions the participation, in reciprocity, of all the others and whose perspective is open to anyone who wants to engage freely in it. On the one hand, it is a matter of “pledging” oneself and everything that one is living. That is, it means anticipating putting in a real way one’s whole life (mind, heart, time, energy, and talents) at the disposal of the others, opening oneself together with all the others to the search for and the incarnation of wisdom. On the other hand, it is to renew continually, as if always the first time, one’s decision to participate responsibly and actively, with one’s whole self, in this adventure.

Precisely for this reason, it does not aim at building up something particular or definitive: It opens itself up with a universal gaze and with sincere and inexhaustible openness to everything that is new, to welcome all the paths of life and truth, from whoever has sincerely undertaken the journey toward the fullness of truth.

What Chiara lived, almost as the crowning of the event of ’49, comes to our aid in this distinctive experience and interpretation

of the idea of a university proposed in the light of the charism of unity. In fact, when she had to return to Trent after her time in the mountains, with its illuminations, unleashed by the Pact with Iginio Giordani, it was he who reminded her that her existence was consecrated to Jesus Forsaken. And it was at that moment (September 20, 1949) Chiara wrote that extraordinary passage: “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.”

In this choice of Jesus Forsaken, and in this living-space opened by him, the university forged by the charism of unity also finds its place and its criterion for existence: in an openness and a dialogue as broad as the horizons of Jesus in “making himself one” with everyone and with each one, to the point of his kenosis lived on the cross. In this way, everyone and each one can and must find a welcome and a word in this school of wisdom whose only limits are a humanity and a cosmos visited by the love of God.

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