

Editorial

The current issue of *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* reserves generous room for an article by Fabio Ciardi, a long-time member of the Abba School, a group of experts from various disciplines who collaborated with Chiara Lubich from 1990 until 2008 in the study of her mystical text, *Paradise '49*. The article that we publish here first appeared as a series in the Italian publication *Città Nuova* and is meant to offer a non-specialist introduction to *Paradise '49*, which is being prepared for publication both in Italian and in a number of translations, including English. The published text will present the fruit of the Abbà School's editorial work in assembling and ordering Chiara Lubich's writings from the period between 1949 and 1951 and will contain valuable indications as to the dating of various fragments

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of texts and the order that Lubich intended. The basic structure of *Paradise '49*, following Lubich's indications, is a series of paragraphs numbered 1 through 1,724. In his article, Ciardi decided to omit reference to the numbered paragraphs, and *Claritas* has opted to leave his article as originally published, without reference to paragraph numbers. Ciardi desires instead to foreground the aesthetic qualities of Lubich's text, and in this context, paragraph references would burden his treatment. For Ciardi, the experience of reading *Paradise '49* is analogous to that of a traveler discovering a constantly shifting terrain. The result is a unique overview of the main movements in Lubich's text and is the only general introduction to *Paradise '49* currently available in English. Ciardi's article will provide a broad framework for more specialized treatments of *Paradise '49* that *Claritas* intends to host in future issues, especially in view of the publication of the English translation.

In Chiara Lubich's understanding, the text of *Paradise '49* is valuable only to the extent that it helps readers to participate in the experience it describes. Ciardi opens his treatment with the following quotation from Lubich herself: "All these pages are worth nothing if the soul who reads them does not love, is not in God. They have value if it is God who reads them in that soul." Lubich does not intend her text to be something from which principles may be deduced and then be applied on the authority of the text itself. Instead, the experience that the text describes can, if lived in some measure by the reader, promotes a particular experience of God, and this experience can illuminate the world for those who share in that experience. The articles published in this issue can be understood in this way.

The first article is by Piero Coda, who also participated in the experience of the Abba School with Chiara and who is currently

the rector at the Sophia University Institute, which, as the editorial of the journal's previous issue stated, is now the institutional home of the *Claritas* journal. The article published here is a reflection on a significant experience of dialogue in which Coda has been involved with other members of the academic community of Sophia University Institute. This experience, known as Wings of Unity, is organized together with a group of Shia Muslims associated with the Islamic Centre of England. As Coda presents it, the experience of dialogue can touch the deepest roots of one's religious commitment and identity and can itself be an experience of God. The talk upon which the article is based, titled "Unity of God, Unity in God," not uncoincidentally was held at Tonadico (Trent), the very place where the experience of God described in *Paradise '49* took place. In this article, Coda argues that we are witnessing in our time a Second Axial Age, wherein members of various religious traditions are called to meet one another *in God*, making interreligious dialogue an essential part of one's commitment to one's own religious identity.

The second article published here, by Anan Alkass Yousif, introduces certain themes in the poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye. In some ways, Yousif's article is a further expression of the same general theme. We live in a time of meetings and encounters with others, and we are constantly confronted with questions of religious and cultural identity and the meaning of our encounter with those who are other than us. Naomi Shihab Nye explores such themes in poetry, with reference to her own Palestinian-American background, and points constantly to the meaning of our shared humanity and the importance of bridge-building. Yousif is a lecturer in American literature at the University of Baghdad, and her studies at Sophia University Institute allowed her to participate in

the experience of *Paradise '49*. Yousif's interest in intercultural encounters in literature expresses the intentions of a Culture of Unity in a fresh and unexpected way, and we are pleased to publish this study in our journal.

Finally, Robert Young, an Irishman living in South Africa, develops another theme of central interest to *Paradise '49*: Jesus Forsaken. He is interested in the window that contemporary atheism opens onto the intimate reality of God. The writings of Jean-Luc Nancy, he argues, reveal a startlingly new openness to an experience of faith born of atheism that can be considered as a kind of light for the darkness of our age. Fabio Ciardi quotes Chiara Lubich on Jesus Forsaken: "Around us everything is Jesus Forsaken. Everything therefore is loveable because beneath everything and everyone we see the Spouse of our soul. . . . He, Worm of the earth, Ugliness, a meld of blood and tears, of pain, is God." It is to precisely such an experience of God that Young is pointing in his richly allusive article.

Thus, the collection of articles in this issue points to how their authors, illuminated by the experience recounted in *Paradise '49*, have learned to look on realities as diverse as interreligious encounter, intercultural identity, and contemporary atheist thought with eyes renewed by the experience of God.