

Paradise 1949 Told by Chiara in 1969

Chiara Lubich

Abstract: *Chiara Lubich recounts her experience of Paradise 1949 in 1969. At the time of this account she was unaware that many of her writings from this period had been preserved. She speaks directly from her memory of the events. This is a transcription of a speech given to members of the Movement but will be of great interest to anyone interested in Paradise 1949 and complements the yet to be published canonical version of the experience composed from surviving writings from the period.*

First of all, I'd like to make it clear what 1949 was. It was a gift from God. It wasn't God. So, however great it was, we have to make it clear that it was a gift of God, and not God himself. So, the God whom we have chosen is something

Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2019)
3–16 © 2019

much greater than what God has given us. On the other hand, we can't deny that God does give gifts and we shouldn't despise these gifts from God. We can also qualify the various gifts of God, give a particular weight to some of these gifts, a different weight to others. . . .

So now I am seeing the significance of what happened, of this particular gift of God. And I am seeing that it is important not just for us focolarini, but for the world and for the church, and that there is a patrimony there that will take centuries to understand. I am also seeing that maybe, if I manage to rewrite it, it will be the greatest gift that the Work of Mary will leave to the church and the world.

The Vision from God's Point of View

The impression I have this morning is that what happened to me is like what happened immediately after the conversion of St. Ignatius. This was not because of some merit on his part, and the same is true of me: it was not because of my merit or that of anyone else.

It was truly the religious vision of the universe, the religious vision of the world. That is, the way God sees the world, how God sees things, how God sees creatures, how God sees Paradise.

The other day I spoke to you about '43; that is when the Movement began. But at a certain point, this Movement had to be consolidated as an Opera.¹ Up to that point, it was a simple Movement and we had no intention, as I have said on other occasions,

1. The word "opera," which literally means "work," was used in Catholic environments to refer to what came to be called ecclesial movements. Chiara distinguishes "Movement" from "Opera" and sees the experience of the Pact and the experience of Paradise as a transition from the first to the second.

to make a rule, because I couldn't understand why approval was needed to be Christians. But at a certain point, God wanted these Christians also to be a particular Opera in the church. This reminded us of Mary, who, although she is but one particular of the whole, is nevertheless everything that she is.

And since at the time Loppiano² didn't exist yet, there was no formation. What I understood was that the Lord needed us focolarine to have a kind of novitiate. At the time I had been living the Ideal for five years. The others came later, so they would have had two or three years of Ideal.

Since there was no Loppiano and no school of formation therefore, it was the Teacher, Jesus, [who intervened] and he brought Paradise. And the Trinity was our school, where we learned. What did we learn? Who God is and what the Opera is.

This was the thing that I understood this morning. I had been wondering, "Did I see the Opera?" or "Did I see Paradise?" This morning I understood that I saw both. And so, if I saw Paradise, I saw the vision of the world from God's standpoint. And if I saw the Opera, I saw the Opera and the function that the Opera has in the church. So, just to have an idea . . .

A Gift of God

If I can recount this to you today, it is like a mother on a feast day, who gathers all the children together and tells them about the wonderful things of the past, those things that never pass, because they keep coming back. Just like a mother who opens up the jewelry box, shows the children what's inside, and then

2. Loppiano is a little town belonging to the Focolare Movement where in the 1960s the school of formation of the focolarini and focolarine was established.

closes it again quickly so that the child doesn't take anything away from it, so that the child doesn't become too curious. I do the same myself. I open the casket and then I close it up again immediately. Because this is not the moment to show everything. It is not God's will, because God has to make me see everything again, because I was a little disoriented by these first impressions. But then everything else will be told. Maybe not everything, but much will be told.

So, how will we proceed?

That's the thing. It was a gift. And a gift is not God himself. Nevertheless, it was God's gift. And while it is true that in the future this thing will truly be the church's patrimony, it is also true that it is first of all your patrimony, and so it is right that you should have it.

So, how did this thing happen?

In reality, it was also very simple. Indeed, to me it was extremely simple. At the same time, I have such great gratitude to God for what he has done for this Opera that I cannot quantify it.

I said that we *pope*³ had already done our "external formation."⁴ And how did we do this? With great commitment, because it is God who is bringing you ahead. And when he wants something, he doesn't have brakes. So, he had made us live these years in a particularly and perhaps uniquely intense way. So, it is only now,

3. Chiara uses the word "pope" affectionately to refer to her female companions with whom she shared the experience of the Focolare. It is a word taken from the dialect of Trent, meaning "girls."

4. The "external formation" is a period of formation for focolarini. This period, which comes before the school of formation occurs in Loppiano, is deemed "external" because the candidates are usually not yet integrated into the focolare houses. Above, Chiara references a kind of novitiate. This corresponds to the "external" formation.

with this little group that is learning to live the present moment that we may take up this race again. And we had learned many things. Already in the first moments, the first months, we had understood the fundamental ideas of the Ideal as a spirituality: Jesus in the midst, Jesus Forsaken, charity, everything.

A Change of Mentality

Where the Lord had focused our attention was especially on the Word of Life and on living it. I remember that we knew the gospel, almost by heart. It is not like now where every month we try to live a Word as best we can and then we do other things. At that time, we did nothing other than living the Word, because we didn't have other particular activities to do. So the Word of God truly entered into us. And if today the Ideal has become the way in which many people think, even outside the Movement, it is because we lived with such intensity that the mentality of that first group of people changed. This mentality, since it was light, moves by itself and is seen by many, if they take it and make it their own.

And it meant putting the whole worldly mentality into question. A divine protest, because it was a divine mentality that was entering a human mentality. But not just the mentality; it was entering our will, entering our affective life, into the whole of our humanity. So, we were being re-evangelized.

And among us *pope* we had had a unique experience, and in this we were directed only by Jesus in the midst, which has never been repeated in such an intense way in the Movement.

This was: you live one Word of Life, a second Word of Life, a third Word of Life, a fourth Word of Life. . . . We understood at a certain point that whatever Word of Life we lived, the practical external effects were the same. So, living “blessed are the pure

of heart” or “the poor in spirit” or “the meek” came to the same thing. Living “love your neighbor as yourself” or “don't do unto others what you would not want done unto you.” . . . Whatever Word of Life we lived we reached the same conclusion, that is, we were being called to act in the same way. So everything came to coincide.

And we had discovered that the Word of God was truly the Word of God, even if it was expressed in human terms. And being the Word of God, it was charity. In this way, we had discovered beneath the Word of God the essence that lies beneath, that is God, that is: love.

The Fire of the Word of God

In this way, everything became progressively simpler. So much so that in the final months, prior to '49, when one of these Words of God fell into my soul it became fire, flame, and charity. And I lived them with an elasticity that had become like a vortex, a bit like the earth that rotates so much that it appears to be still.

So as soon as the Word of God entered, even before we had time to think about it, it had already become charity.

You might say: “What is this charity?” It is the voice, the voice of God. Yes, the Word of God helped me to amplify what we call the inner voice that guides you and brings you ahead. And this voice had become like a loudspeaker when compared to how we felt it when we were younger, when I used to speak of listening to “that voice” as in the Scripture. And so we heard this voice among the thousands of sounds of the world. And by living the Word of God, this Word entered. And so what were we other than Word and this voice? So inside of me, as soon as a Word came into me it was already flame. So, I felt that inside of me was only love.

We had discovered many other things. For example, how every complete-in-itself Word of God is God, and therefore beneath each is the Trinity. And it was marvelous, because we could see how in every Word of God that we lived, there was a negative aspect and a positive aspect. The “poor” was the negative aspect, while “they shall inherit the kingdom” was the positive aspect. Similarly, the “pure” is the negative aspect, while “they will see God” is the positive aspect. And it was always a purity that was charity, and so it was positive, and a kingdom of God that was charity, and so it was positive. And so, in every Word we had discovered the life of the Most Holy Trinity. So, we had penetrated it not just with contemplation but also with this effect of spiritual life, so that it was the voice of God inside us that guided us.

So we had arrived more or less at this point. Naturally, the first focolarine and focolarini⁵ were with me in everything. And whatever I experienced immediately became the experience of everyone. It wasn't that we could live the Word: he had to live the Word. That was the Ideal; it was living. Perhaps in me this thing was even more accentuated, because I was the guide, but we all had this same experience. And so, within us everything was love.

The impression of our soul was the impression of rising, rising, rising as if along a ray—we used to say it this way—of the will of God. But to speak in this way diminishes it. It was a getting ever closer to the sun, ever closer to God. What does this “rising” mean? It means that the further up you go, the more you

5. Focolarine (also referred to here as *pope*) are female members of the focolare houses or communities and Focolarini (also referred to here as *popi*) are male members of those communities.

leave below the things beneath. They are lost. In fact, my new life, the new life that I had in me, the God who lived in me, had in itself the God of yesterday and of the previous day, and the God of a year ago. So, whatever was behind me collapsed into nothing, because it was all *in* me. So, the impression we had was the impression of climbing, so to speak, of rising ever closer to God.

Vacation in the Mountains

That's when 1949 happened. It seems that I had worn myself out a little and was a bit tired. So, the doctor suggested that I take a break in the mountains and leave behind the life of the Movement. And my companions said that I shouldn't go alone and that they would come with me too. So, I agreed of course. But I had no idea what would happen up there. So, having left the Movement behind, we went up into the mountains. I remember—and Father Spiazzi says it too—that Wisdom often uses little external details to communicate with souls and especially inexperienced souls like us. So, I remember the impression that a poster for a film made on us: “Amidst the peaks I'll bear you away.” But this was just one sign among many, because God uses many means.

So, when we arrived up in the mountains, I noticed a second phenomenon: that this kind of fire that was inside me—because the Word had become fire as well as Word—was also a voice and that, as soon as it entered into us, the gospel flamed up. And I found myself saying: “I have just finished a first phase of living the Word of God; later I will live it again in a different way, because here everything is becoming fire, everything is becoming God.” So if, inside me—and inside the *pope*, I think—things were like this; outside us there was something else. The Lord, through an extraordinary grace, showed me all of nature differently from how

I see it now, or how you see it now, or how I myself had seen it previously.

A Spiritual Sun

So, the vision of God beneath all things was very strong—obviously a special grace of God. So, if the pine trees were gilded by the sun, if the streams ran down in their waterfalls glistening in the sunlight, and so on, if the daisies, the other flowers, the sky . . . beneath every created thing that I saw there was a spiritual sun—not the sun—but stronger, and I saw it.

You might ask me: “What did you see, Chiara?”

With the soul.

“But what did you see?”

God who sustains all things. God who holds everything up.

“But how did you see it?”

So, I saw that God beneath things made them be not as we see them; they were all linked among themselves by love, all in love with one another.

So if the stream flowed into the sea, it was out of love. If one pine tree rose up beside another, it was out of love. Saying “out of love” is unclear. I saw love, which is God, beneath things, which bound all things together. And this was a blinding sun. And so, the vision of this unity that God gave us or, even better, the vision of God who united everything in creation, was stronger than the things themselves.

I was at this point in the spiritual life when, at a certain moment, Foco came to the mountains. Until that point, I had felt the need to meet someone who . . . , because I felt that the Ideal wasn’t a common thing. The *pope* who were with me, in contrast, believed that everything was normal.

A Sweet Engrafting

This was because the Lord hadn’t treated me in a rough way. What he did was he called me and I followed. But he didn’t give me visions. He didn’t throw me off a horse. Instead he gently engrafted himself onto my nature. So much so that in the first moments, when I explained the Ideal to the *pope*, I explained it in philosophical terms, because that was the language that I knew, having studied philosophy. And so I didn’t have other terms with which to say these things, but they weighed me down, they seemed unpleasant to me. So, I said, I should have other words to say these things. But I didn’t have other words; my language was philosophical.

So, this light, which also had many episodes in the earlier times of my spiritual life, gradually engrafted itself onto my nature and my life, the life of grace engrafted itself gently, and so we arrived at this point in a sweet way, without violent shifts.

The *pope* believed that this was the Christian life. So much so that Giosi [one of my companions], was amazed that others didn’t live in the same way. She said: “How come the members of Catholic Action don’t live in the same way?” And the same with the other *pope*; they were like children who drank the same milk. And they thought that everyone drank the same milk. But they didn’t understand what the Ideal was, while I had a sense that there was something different from Christianity as normally understood. Deep down inside, I felt the need for someone who would confirm this for me.

An Important Personality

And so, I met Foco, who was older than me. He was twenty-five years older than me. He was, and is, a well-known personality in the church. He knew the church well, had fought for the church,

had known the saints, had written many biographies of saints—he was a hagiographer—he was the one who had a kind of divine plan or design not to be behind me, following, but ahead of me, helping me to understand what the Ideal was. And this then justified what I felt; that someone could tell me that it was something new. But we needed someone like him to do it.

Throughout his life—his vocation is a splendid thing—Foco had sought a virgin he could follow and bring him to God. He was in love with Saint Catherine and was her follower, and he had sought her and was obviously called to do so. When Foco encountered this spirit [i.e., Chiara herself], there was this great understanding between them immediately. And for me too, in front of him, only 28 years old, like a child . . . he was such an important personality, and I was just a provincial girl. But none of this made much impression on me. What impressed me was the beauty of Foco’s soul. He was the Christian, the open Christian, highly intelligent and learned, of great culture, but that culture that is capable of making itself really nothing. That’s how Foco was.

So, I met him. He was immediately taken with me. He came up to see us, to meet me in Fiero di Primiero, where I was with the *pope* in that mountain cabin. Actually, it wasn’t really much more than a cowshed at the time. It didn’t have windows or anything. Eight of us slept there in the same room.

One day something apparently simple happened. Foco comes to me. I don’t remember exactly, but it seems that I had already been speaking with him about the Word of God and, above all, what I had been saying was how everything had gone up in flames for me, and how the Word par excellence was “My God, My God, why . . .,” that is, it was Jesus Forsaken, which for me was Jesus in his fullest expression—final in the sense of redeemer—the way

he had really annihilated himself, made himself nothing. . . . And so I said, “All the Words of God basically amount to this: nothingness and everything. On the nothing that we are, there is the everything that is God.”

As I remember, I was explaining Jesus Forsaken in this way, as the Word of God. Because if Jesus is the Word, he is the Word of God; Jesus in his dereliction is the Word unfurled, fully open and explained. Jesus, who took the nothingness upon himself and filled it up: the vanity of all things and filled them up and divinized them. And it’s him: God. . . . So, Jesus Forsaken was everything, he was the Word. I explained these things to Foco, and he followed and understood. And I explained them to the *pope* too, and they followed and understood.

A Special Pact

One day, Foco called me aside; he felt called to say this to me: “Listen, I want to become a saint. So, I want to bind myself tightly, as Saint Catherine says, and so I would like to make a vow of obedience to you, Chiara. Because I have the impression that God has chosen you, and all of my life I have sought a virgin to be able to follow her. And I think I have found her. I want to do your will, Chiara, and I think it is God’s will that I do so.” He said, “In this way, Chiara, we will become saints.” And he gave me an example: Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Jane de Chantal, who had become saints together.

I listened, but I didn’t like the idea. Something within me reacted negatively to the idea. I had two feelings together. One said, “Here Foco is under the action of a grace; we shouldn’t waste this grace.” The other feeling said, “No, not just two of us. All should be one, not just two being one. That, ‘all might be one’ (Jn 17:21),

not two might be one. Yes, Saint Francis de Sales might have become a saint in that way, but this is not my path: all, all one.” And I didn’t understand the part about obedience either. I said: “A vow to me? Why? One with me and with everyone.⁶ Why obedience to me?” The Opera didn’t exist at the time. But I didn’t say these things to him at the time, because it would have been like a mortification.

So I said to Foco, “Look, it might be that what you feel is really from God. But not two one, all one. But it may really be that it is from God so we shouldn’t waste it. . . . You know my life, it is to be nothing, because I live Jesus Forsaken, and so I exist if I am nothing. He is everything, I am the nothingness. So, if I want to be what I truly am, I have to be nothing, and in this way I exist. And you are nothing, because you too are Jesus Forsaken. We have to live this nothingness. If we are this nothingness, then we are what we are, because we put ourselves in our true being. As Saint Catherine said: ‘I am nothing, you are Everything.’”

And I had learned this following Jesus Forsaken, and Foco had understood it. So I said, “Let’s do this. Tomorrow, when we go to Mass and there, when Jesus-Eucharist enters into me and when Jesus-Eucharist enters into you, he will enter into an empty chalice because there is nothing there. So we, who are nothing, will say to him . . . I will say, ‘Jesus, make unity with Jesus-Eucharist in him, and bring about that unity that you want with [Foco’s] soul.’” So we went to the church, to Mass, and at Communion, Jesus entered our heart. At Communion I really made this pact and said to Jesus: “On the nothingness of me, which I am, I ask

you to make this pact of unity with you on the nothingness of Foco who is there.”

In the Bosom of the Trinity

We left the church. Foco had to go back in through the sacristy to give a talk to the Capuchin Fathers. I felt urged to return to the church itself. I entered the church and went in front of the tabernacle. And, in front of the tabernacle I was about to begin a prayer to Jesus-Eucharist, beginning, “Jesus . . .” But I couldn’t say it because Jesus was here. I too was him. It was me. I was one with him. I was him. I couldn’t call myself. And I found myself as a person on the peak of a very, very high mountain, as though I was on a very fine point, fine like a needle. And one.

So [I was on] a very high mountain, but incapable of calling out to the one who I was. The Eucharist doesn’t call out to itself. And there I heard a word emerge from my mouth: “Father.”

And in that moment, I found myself in the bosom of the Most Holy Trinity.

You might ask me: “How did it happen? What did you see?”

It was as if I had entered into an immense abyss, like the universe, but even greater. I saw it, not with these eyes, but with the eyes of the soul. I almost didn’t have these eyes, didn’t have these eyes. And to the eyes of my soul it appeared to be all made of gold, all flames. And I found myself there. And I realized that the one who had put the word “*Abba*, Father” on my lips had been the Holy Spirit. And that Jesus-Eucharist, the bond of unity, had been truly the bond of unity between me and Foco. And that he alone remained on these two nothingnesses. And that our two rays had arrived at the point where they converge in the sun. And it was as if I had arrived in this infinite sun. And that outside of me had

6. She means that the unity that was her ideal was a unity between all people, and not between two individuals.

remained created reality. And I understood that I had entered into the uncreated: into God, into the bosom of the Father. I didn't see what was in Paradise. I couldn't distinguish anything, but this did not disturb me. It was infinite, but I felt very much at home.

Foco came out from his meeting with the Fathers. "Come," I said to him. We went around the church and walked over to and sat on a bench. I said, "Listen to what happened to me. Do you know where we are?" And I explained. Foco listened.

Then I went home. And I loved the *pope*. And the *pope* had followed me to that point, and I wanted to tell them everything. So I gathered them together and told them. I said what was happening to me and what I saw. I said, "Listen, come with us. On your own tomorrow, ask Jesus-Eucharist in you to make the pact of unity on the nothingness of you with Jesus-Eucharist in me and in Foco."

A "Small Company" in the Bosom of the Father

The following day, the *pope* went to church. I remember that they were in the pew behind me and they did as I had suggested. Then they came out from the church and said to me, "Chiara, what do you see?" I answered, "I saw in the bosom of the Father a small company: that's us." So, the *pope* were so taken because I communicated these things to them, and as I was telling them these things, I was also giving them these things. And the *pope* saw the things with my eyes. And they too felt themselves to be in the bosom of the Father. And they too saw these things.

I said, "Something new is beginning here. Where will we end up? I don't know. Now, tomorrow we will renew our communion with God—what will happen? I don't know." We entered the church and received Communion. And then we were accustomed

to doing the following: we lived that reality, so that even though we were doing our various jobs, even though we continued doing the normal things, our walks and so on, we were there. And at 6:00 in the evening, we went in front of that statue of Our Lady there, in Tonadico, to have meditation.

And I said something very strange to the *pope*, that was not at all common. The meditation was quite different from the normal one. I said, "Don't think about anything, anything at all." Because I had understood, in Paradise, that this little company, even though in a certain way I did see it made up of a group of persons. . . . I didn't call it a group anymore, since the warmth of the Trinity and God's Spirit, which was stronger than any of our individual spirits, had fused us into one, and I called this the "Soul," with a capital S. We were the Soul.

And I told them: "The Soul has a center." Years later, I learned that Saint Teresa of Avila says that the soul has a center. Only that, in her case, it was an individual spirituality, while here it was a collective spirituality. And it was evident that the center of the Soul was here.⁷

So I said to the *pope*, "Come, adore Jesus during meditation, but while adoring him, become nothing. You have to be nothing, so that he can tell us what he has brought about through the new communion." So the *pope* made this effort to not think, to not be. So this was the maximum meditation, right? And I did the very same, while waiting for God to help me understand what the new communion had brought about. Because there were two communions: the daily Communion with him, and the communion with the *pope*, among us. I gave everything to them. And then we went

7. Chiara uses the word "here" to refer to herself.

to Jesus to receive whatever he would have given us and then I communicated this to the *pope* and then we went back to him.

The Word of God

So, that evening, we go for the meditation. I gather myself in the Trinity, within. . . . On television the other day, I saw the photograph of the earth seen from the moon, where you can see a part of the moon, and the earth far beyond. And you might say, “Was it something like that Chiara?” Yes, it was also something like that. Because God adapted these visions to my eyes. But it was infinitely [more]. . . . I can’t explain it.

So anyway, in the meditation that evening, I went to the meditation and I spent a moment recollected with Jesus, without a thought, and I felt that from all . . . —if I can express it like this—from all of the infinite walls of the bosom of the Father, there was a single word pronounced, but in an infinite number of ways: “Love.” And it came to be concentrated in the bosom of the Father. And it was the Son.

And there the Lord had me understand that the Father, expressing himself, who is charity, who is love, generates the Son, the light: himself. And there I understood an infinite number of things. I understood . . . —ah, I can’t explain it.

Then I went out with the *pope*. And they said to me: “Where are we? What do we see?” I said, “I saw the Word of God.”

“What’s that?”

I remember that I was up near a little church, in Tonadico, and there was a wonderful sunset, and the sun had just disappeared behind the mountain, and rays of light were shooting up. I told them: “There, that’s how it is. The Word is the splendor of the Father—the Father is the sun—he is the splendor of the Father.”

But then I understood, and it was he who helped me to understand it, that if the Trinity, the Father, in his bosom generates the Word, who is God, it’s like, using a human illustration, the converging rays of the sun. In creation he created all things, while looking at the Son, as if by diverging rays. And through the Son all things had been made. And there was the footprint of the Word in all things. And of all things, there were many that at the end of the world, having returned to the bosom of the Father, would have returned like many Word [*sic*] in one Word.⁸ In the created world there were many plants, in the Word was the plant. Many flowers, but in the Word was the flower. Many mountains, but in the Word was the mountain. Many stars, but in the Word. . . . And that at the end of the world these rays would have been drawn back into the bosom of the Father, and they would have constituted new heavens and a new earth.

Then, among us *pope*, we asked ourselves: “What’s going to happen next?”

A Portion of Church

And so we wanted to prove to ourselves how incapable humanity is of understanding God’s mind, and we said, “Let’s see if we can guess what we will see next, so that later, when it’s something entirely different, we will see God’s triumph over the human.” So I said, “Logically now we’re going to see the Holy Spirit, no? That’s how it’s going to be. You will see, you will see.” And, so, all of us together, all of us inside the Trinity—the Soul was in the Trinity—went to the new Communion, and the *pope* consistently

8. Chiara says, “many Word [*sic*] in one Word,” presumably to emphasize the radical unity of the many when they converge in the Word who is in the bosom of the Father.

lived that new reality that was there on the basis of their nothingness, their silence.

And in this new reality we understood something. During the meditation in the evening—then the *pope* were waiting for me outside—we understood that the Word was marrying the Soul, and that the Soul was Church, was a little piece of Church. I don't know how to say it.

Then we understood, and I felt it, as if the Word was saying to the Soul—which was nothing other than Jesus in our midst, “You are my beloved Son.” And I understood that he was going to tell me everything, that the Word would explain everything to me: all of creation and all of the Uncreated.

At the End of the World

Then I understood how at the end of the world there will be Paradise and Hell. And I understood that these rays, that had diverged from the center of Paradise in creation bringing order, love, and life to creation, would be withdrawn from creation at the end of the world, leaving whatever remained without order, love, and life. That what remained would be Hell. And that in what remained there would be no unity. Such that fire would not make unity with cold. There would not be anything lukewarm. Rather, there would be “fire and gnashing of teeth.” And I understood that whatever remained outside the Trinity would have been like a corpse. It will have eyes made for seeing but which no longer see; a breast made to rise and breathe but which would no longer rise; a heart made for loving but which would no longer be able to love. I understood that the men and women who remained outside, outside of Paradise, would have tried to meet one another, but that every meeting would have become a

fight and that forever they would move from disunity to disunity, from disunity to disunity, from disunity to disunity. And that either one would continue running and the other would always be still, because there wasn't unity, because order will have been withdrawn.

Meanwhile, in heaven I saw the opposite. That the meetings of souls, that every soul who had returned to heaven by their own will, would have been a Word of God that, lost—as we had tried to do ourselves—making themselves nothing in the Word, would have been Word in the Word. And that [if] I had not returned to Paradise, he would not have lost anything of me, nor would the blessed in heaven be missing anything of me, since they would see me in the Word of God, from which I had come forth. They would see the Idea of me. And that Paradise would not suffer because of my absence. And that even those things that might have been in the future would have been seen in God. In that case, the blessed would have gained, because they would have participated, as free and immortal, in the joy of God himself. They would have been God in God, Word in Word.

Ever New Meetings

And I understood that every Word would have been God. And that the meeting of two creatures up there would have been a song of songs. And that if we go up there, for example, at a certain point we would all be together like a rosebud. Then, in a different moment—because of the distinction which is intrinsic to the trinitarian life—we would have distinguished ourselves . . . , and each one of us would have been a rose, and that this would have then opened up into many petals, but that each one of these was Word and that therefore it would open up into many petals. Then,

many meetings, then dances, then different forms of musics;⁹ then Paradise, blessedness, happiness, God.

Then I understood that Jesus Forsaken had made the nothingness his own. He had become sin, which means nothingness: *the* nothing. And that he had incarnated the word: “All is vanity of vanities”; and another: “The heavens and the earth will pass away.” He had incarnated this emptiness when he made himself forsaken. He had also made himself that word then: “The heavens and the earth will pass away,” and he had divinized this word bringing it into heaven. And that the thought of the existence of Hell would not be disgusting in heaven Because Hell. . . . Jesus in his dereliction, made himself sin, and therefore nothingness, and therefore Hell. So, for those who were in Paradise, looking at Hell they would have seen Jesus Forsaken.

And I understood therefore that for Paradise, Hell would have been Paradise. And that Jesus Forsaken’s cry, which was his final cry on the cross, was like a swan song of the Son of God on earth. And that for Paradise, Hell would have been super-Paradise, the Paradise of Paradise. And that in the other life there would not have been that division, disunity, that lack of harmony. Instead, everything would have been made harmonious by Jesus Forsaken.

Then I explained all of these things to the *pope*, even though I did not see all of this in heaven. I just saw this infinite abyss in which the Soul did not feel disoriented even though we were so small. As if everything was full, and as if everything was home, and it was infinite.

9. Chiara writes “musiche,” which is the plural of “musica.” Music is uncountable in English, but in this case the translator has preferred to preserve the plural.

A Blue Sky Containing the Sun

Then we went back to Communion, after having explained these things and lived them. And we said: “What will we see next?” But we didn’t know the answer.

So, we went back to Communion. And the Lord helped me understand Mary, using my imagination but also my reason. I had never understood her in this way. I discovered that I hadn’t really known Mary at all. And he showed her to me when we were in the bosom of the Trinity. And he gave me this concept: as the blue sky contains the sun, so Mary had been made so great as to contain God himself. I had not had this sense of the measure of Mary. And I was stunned. And I said to the *pope* that I used to have another concept of Mary, like . . . I thought of her as a Christian first, like a little statue, like one of those little statues of Our Lady. I had never had the idea of Mary in all her greatness, as I had seen her in Paradise. And I explained it to the *pope*. And it was then that the first understanding of Mary was born. It was as if he was saying to me: “I made Mary great, even greater than myself—but it is he who had made her so great—because she contained me.”

And so, I go to the *pope* and say: “What’s going on! We are in the Trinity, the Soul has married the Word, the Word has married the Soul, we are Church. Now he has introduced Mary to us: Why? Why not the Holy Spirit?” Then I understood. The third, fourth, and fifth day had come; I don’t know exactly; and we went back to Communion. And at Communion. . . . We were always ready for anything unexpected, but it is as though I didn’t expect it, because I wasn’t the kind of person that these things happened to, except that these also had a powerful influence, weighing down my body, to the extent that I felt as though I was going to explode

as soon as the illumination came to me sometimes in the pew, where I was amidst the *pope*.

The Atmosphere of Heaven

And we went before the statue of Mary. And at a certain moment we begin adoring Jesus in the Eucharist, in the tabernacle. And I become aware—and this was the strangest thing yet—of something like a little breeze coming out of the tabernacle, like a waft of air, like a waft of air. I looked, and later I checked to see if the windows were open or closed. But they were sealed windows.

I didn't understand what it was, but I understood that something was coming out from the tabernacle and was coming toward me. And without having ever, ever thought about it, I saw a dove—it was probably about twenty centimeters across—come out of the tabernacle. And I realized that it was the Holy Spirit. And that the soul of the tabernacle, the air . . . I realized that the Holy Spirit was in the heart of Jesus in the tabernacle. And it came out. It came out and came toward me. It positioned itself above my head and those of the *pope*, and slowly circled in very, very, very slow circles. And then it stopped as if in the position to shed light. But it didn't shed light.

And there in the Trinity, I understood that the Holy Spirit, spouse of the Virgin Mary, closed the Trinity. He had allowed his spouse to come first, set as a jewel in the Trinity. And that the Son, the Word, having wed the Soul, had shown his Mother to it. And that he was conducting us on a honeymoon voyage, showing us all of his treasures. These were just the first of many. The treasures of the uncreated and of creation. And I realized that within, in the bosom of the Father, the atmosphere of the Father, the atmosphere of Paradise, was the Holy Spirit: it was the Holy Spirit.

A Kaleidoscope of Visions

Things kept happening. Every day a new vision. And after a few days there was more than one vision a day. And it was the Soul that saw all of these things, the little Church that God then consecrated to Mary, as it had to become another Mary in the world, in the church. And how we were destined to be a little Mary. That was another vision that I had.

I saw the Opera as it would be and as it now is. I was at the heart of this Opera, in the center, veiled. Then later I understood that it was the presence of someone else who, together with me, had as a vocation in this Opera—as I used to say—to set the tone in the Opera. And that person who was “veiled”—at the time I didn't know who it was so I couldn't understand it—would be an assistant, someone who would represent the church for me. Maybe it was Father Foresi,¹⁰ who was not yet there. And around me, as in a semicircle, the *pope*. And then the first *pope*. And behind them, the religious orders and all of the church.

Then, for example, at a certain moment in this immense sea, ocean, indeed universe, that I was telling you about, that I had seen made of gold and flames, I don't know, at a certain moment there was like a leap forward, as when from the light, the seven colors [of the rainbow] emerge, and I saw a majestic landscape, as the new heavens and new earth will be. And there were trees and there were birds and there were flowers.

That which previously had been uniform was all of a sudden full of colors. And I saw heaven within, as it will be. And then

10. This is Pasquale Foresi, one of the first focolarini and considered by Chiara a cofounder of the Movement. He became the first focolarino to be ordained presbyter in 1954 and became the Movement's first copresident.

many things, then many more things. More than a hundred and eighty of these visions that the Lord gave me.

And at the end, he made me understand: “What you have seen is not this way. I adapted the vision of the Trinity to your eyes, to your three dimensions. Because you are a creature and you can’t see with God’s eyes. It is not how you have seen it, but you have it this way. What you have seen is true. But I have shown it to you in a human way, so that you can see it.”

The Evolution of an Opera

But I felt that everything that I had seen, I had seen within. Indeed, I felt myself more sublimated than ever after more than a hundred and eighty visions rather than feeling lost. It was as if everything that I had seen had evaporated, as if it had been sublimated, as if it had been undone. And the Lord made me understand, “Yes, because I adapted things that your eyes of this world, and even your soul, cannot see. But they are true.” What I felt, he didn’t tell me, but I felt it and it remained within me. And in these one hundred and eighty visions, I saw all of the evolution of the Opera, all of the evolution of the Opera, all of the evolution of the Opera.

And after twenty years now, because now it is 1969, and that was 1949, I saw—and I can say it now—that many, almost all of those things—you can’t imagine it—are being realized. Many have already come about, and many more will come about. And the last one will be when we reach the *ut omnes*.¹¹ And I understood that this Paradise that I saw, this heaven that was in us, in our midst,

would be in each of us, in all of those who will form the heavenly Jerusalem: unity, the *ut omnes*.

Chiara Lubich (1920–2008) was the foundress of the Focolare Movement, and of the Sophia University Institute. In 1977 she received the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion and Peace. In 1996 she received the UNESCO Peace Education Prize. Her wide-ranging influence on various fields of academic research has been recognized in numerous honorary doctorates in various disciplines, including theology, philosophy, economics, social science, social communications. She is author of many books, articles and published letters. At present, the Congregation for the Cause of Saints is in the process of considering her cause for sainthood.

11. The expression *ut omnes* is drawn from the Latin translation of John 17:21 and refers to the prayer “That all may be one.”