

Chiara Lubich: A Saint for a New Global Unity¹

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Abstract: *In this article the author offers an introduction to the life, thought, and impact of Chiara Lubich. He begins with a brief biographical overview and draws attention to some important features of her spiritual teaching: Jesus in the midst, Jesus Forsaken, Mary Desolate, the four nights. He draws attention to the Economy of Communion and as an expression of this spirituality in the world of business and economics, and to the figure of Chiara Luce Badano, a young adherent to the Spirituality of Unity who has been recognized as an example of how this spirituality can lead to holiness of life. The author's judgment is that Chiara Lubich is "a saint of dialogue."*

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The Discovery of God in the Midst of Bombardment

Chiara Lubich was born in Trent in 1920 and given the first name Silvia.² Her father, a printer, was a socialist. Her mother was a practicing Catholic. Her brother would later write against the fascists in a newspaper sponsored by the Communist Party in Italy. In 1939, Chiara received a vocation at the Marian shrine of Loreto to form a community named Focolare (meaning "hearth" in Italian). Four years later, she adopted the name of Chiara, showing her commitment to the spirituality of the Third Order Franciscans to which she belonged. The spirituality of the movement she founded is seen by its members even today as a gathering point for distinct Catholic spiritual traditions, including Franciscans, Carmelites, and Dominicans.³

Trent was severely bombed during World War II. "We stayed in Trent," writes Chiara.⁴ Her commitment to her battered city and beleaguered companions has always been taken as a sign of her resilience. Her social vision follows this same pattern of acting and thinking. Throughout her life, Chiara chose to remain in the midst of the suffering of the world and to make that suffering a place of spiritual fruitfulness.

In 1948, she met Servant of God Iginio Giordani—"Foco," as he came to be known. He was a married layman, a member of the Italian Parliament, and the cofounder of the Focolare Movement. Through his leadership and scholarship, the Focolare Movement

2. See, for example, Jim Gallagher, *A Woman's Work: Chiara Lubich: A Biography of the Focolare Movement and Its Founder* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 1997).

3. Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Itinerario storico-spirituale della comunità religiosa* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1990).

4. Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings: Spirituality, Dialogue, Culture* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2007), 4.

was able to promote a brand of politics as an art of loving everyone, regardless of one's political party.⁵ Today the movement known as Focolare promotes fraternity, the third leg of the French Revolution, in a Christian way as their political platform.⁶

Some Developments

The decades following World War II were filled with formal recognitions for the Movement, new growth, and “inundations” too numerous to mention.⁷ In 1961, in Darmstadt, Germany, for example, Chiara met with Lutheran pastors, signifying the advent of Focolare's fervent commitment to Christian unity. In 1966, she laid the cornerstone of a hospital dedicated to lowering the infant mortality rate among the Bangwa tribe in Fontem, Cameroon. The subsequent forging of unity between the Bangwa and the Focolare has led to a vibrant global network that extends even to Washington, D.C.⁸

The group known as the Bishops Friends of the Focolare was founded in 1976 through Klaus Hemmerle, theologian bishop of Aachen. Two points are significant here. The first regards the close ties between Focolare and the episcopacy and the bishop of Rome. Irish theologian and bishop Brendan Leahy notes that Chiara adopted a Marian profile to complement the Petrine profile of the

5. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 237.

6. See the work of Antonio Maria Baggio and the development of this idea in the economic sphere by Luigino Bruni, for example.

7. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 243. Chiara adopts the term “inundation” from St. John Chrysostom to mean the development of authentic new movements that arise from within a people of unity. The Focolare grew into many new domains, including those of culture and politics, through these inundations.

8. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 245–56.

episcopacy and the pope.⁹ The second point concerns the academic work of the Movement. Theologians such as Hemmerle and Piero Coda and the other members of the Abba School (founded in 1990) have taken Chiara's charism and life as the basis for thinking about the fundamental questions of Catholic unity.¹⁰ Their work stands as a resource for anyone involved in Catholic education, as evidenced in the fine volume titled *Education's Highest Aim*.¹¹

Chiara is also a model for the Catholic university. World War II prevented Chiara from finishing her degree in philosophy. Nevertheless, through her movement she has become a Christian educator par excellence. In fact, in the fall of 2000, the Catholic University of America awarded her an honorary doctorate in education, an occasion that allowed her to give an address on the principles of education that the Movement seeks to foster and gave me the opportunity to meet Chiara in person.¹² In her address, she spoke about the process of education as an *e-ducere* (“drawing out”) of a drive toward unity within people that corresponds to Emmaus, the experience of God with us.¹³

In the public dialogue with university faculty that I helped to organize, I asked Chiara a question about the new social media and how this development would affect young people today. She acknowledged the risks but wanted to emphasize the possibility

9. See Brendan Leahy's excellent book, *The Marian Profile: In the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2000).

10. *An Introduction to the Abba School: Conversations from the Focolare's Interdisciplinary Study Center* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2002).

11. *Education's Highest Aim: Teaching and Learning through a Spirituality of Communion*, ed. Michael James, Thomas Masters, and Amy Uelmen (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2010).

12. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 219–24.

13. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 222.

of creating new networks of practical bonds of friendship through digital media. In general, Chiara often speaks about what at first glance appears to be utopian but can be realized when people are working with God's help and in communion with one another. In fact, the initiative to link social media to a radical new understanding of global media known as NetOne began in June of that year.¹⁴

Jesus in our Midst

One watchword that you often hear among the Focolare is "Jesus is in our midst." It is much more than a slogan. Chiara's advice here was based upon the words of the Gospel: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20).¹⁵ The presence of the Lord in the midst of the hearth of Focolare is not a dream or an illusion. It is a palpable spiritual reality and a force for good in the world.

What kind of teaching is Chiara promoting? The *Essential Writings* of Chiara Lubich were published in English in 2007. The original title was *La dottrina spirituale*, but the translators wisely avoided publishing it as the "Spiritual Doctrine" in English, sensing that such a title would mean little to most English speakers, as we tend to be so practically minded. To some, it might signify an esoteric branch of church teachings, something reserved for the "spiritual" as opposed to the everyday practice of the faith. Such esotericism is a far cry from the universal invitation to live in and for Jesus wherever we are, that is, in the normalcy of life.

On the other hand, the phrase *La Dottrina Spirituale* in Chiara's Italian is a very precise definition of the kind of teaching

we find in the life and works of Chiara Lubich. Chiara has taught us by her example how to live an authentic spiritual teaching of the Lord. Her theology grows out of the new awareness of the relationship between theology and sanctity heralded by thinkers in the twentieth century such as the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar.¹⁶ Her exemplarity makes her a model equally for politics, economics, philosophy, psychology, theology, and education in general. She makes doctrine more spiritual and spirituality more doctrinal. In a historical moment when the two seem to be moving in opposite directions, the teachings of Chiara Lubich are welcome fare.

Jesus arises in our midst. Chiara finds innovative ways to express and apply this fundamental teaching: "Just as two electrical poles do not produce light until they are joined together, likewise two persons cannot experience the light of this charism until they are united in Christ through charity."¹⁷ Jesus is the electrical current that we carry into the world when we prioritize the unity he offers. In the field of education, Chiara underscores the trinitarian roots of the same basic insight: "We believe that our experience of this trinitarian, communitarian spirituality brings to fulfillment many ideas held by outstanding men and women through the history of education, whose initial premises were often different from ours, but who insisted on the importance of education in building a society founded on truly democratic relationships."¹⁸ Inspired by the vision that the human person is created in the light of the communion shared by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Christian

16. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," *Explorations in the Theology*, I, *The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 181–210.

17. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 31.

18. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 223.

14. See <http://www.net-one.org/> for more details.

15. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 30–31, 222–23.

educator can discern what is good and worthwhile in the work of, for example, John Dewey or more recent advocates of service learning. Trinitarian communion is a safeguard against utilitarianism (in a secular or a Christian guise) as well as a spiritual motor for pedagogical innovation. No teaching remains abstract; all that Chiara taught is meant to be applied to the concrete task of forming the unity that is a gift from Christ.

Jesus Forsaken: The Secret to Unity

In my own field, theology, Chiara Lubich has contributed many profound insights. Among these is the idea that Jesus Forsaken is key to a Christian understanding of unity. In living Jesus Forsaken, new insights arise in the practice of the Christian life, in the mission of the church, and in the concrete pursuit of a path for peace and unity in the human family. This teaching evolved out of her own spiritual experience. During the summer of 1949, Igino Giordani went to visit Chiara, who had gone away for a period of rest in the valley of Primiero, in the mountains of Trentino.¹⁹ There they had a cabin where they could escape from the city. They were intensely living out the passage of the Gospel concerning Jesus's abandonment. On July 12, Chiara wrote:

Jesus Forsaken! The important thing is that when he passes by we are attentive to hear what he wants to say to us, because he always has something new to tell us. Jesus Forsaken wants us perfect: He is the only Teacher, Jesus, and

19. Thomas Masters and Amy Uelmen, *Focolare: Living a Spirituality of Unity in the United States* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2011), 28–29. See also Chiara's 1969 account of this experience in this issue of *Claritas*.

he wants to take advantage of all circumstances to mold us, to round off the sharp edges of our personalities, to make us holy. The only thing we must do is to take in all these voices that arise from the circumstances as his voice. All that happens around me happens for me, it's all a choral rendition of the love of God for me.²⁰

When summer ended, it was time to leave the Primiero valley and return to the city. On a piece of paper with the letterhead of the Italian Senate Chamber, which had been lent to her by Giordani, Chiara jotted down a text that is now famous and begins: "I have only one spouse on earth, Jesus Forsaken."²¹ Her descent from that "little Tabor" marked the announcement that the Abandoned One is the way to unity. She wrote, "I'll go through the world searching for him in every instant of my life."²² And so Jesus Forsaken is the "secret" to unity.²³

Two theological points are worth mentioning here. First, Chiara belongs to a tradition of mystical thought that defends the spirituality of abandonment in a Christological and Trinitarian manner. John of the Cross, the eighteenth-century Jesuit Jean Pierre de Caussade, and Hans Urs von Balthasar hold similar views. Jesus on the cross is the abandoned one, and his state of abandonment goes beyond being abandoned by his disciples when he needs time

20. From the Focolare website: <http://www.focolare.org/en/chiara-lubich/spirituality-of-unity/gesu-abbandonato/>.

21. Masters and Uelmen, *Focolare*, 29.

22. From the Focolare website: <http://www.focolare.org/en/chiara-lubich/spirituality-of-unity/gesu-abbandonato/>.

23. Chiara Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, ed. Hubertus Blaumeister (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2016), 42–43.

for solitude. Some theologians, such as von Balthasar, believe that he is abandoned by God the Father, but there is no theological agreement on this position. Chiara cites von Balthasar on the “hell” Jesus experienced in the paschal mystery but also draws from Joseph Ratzinger and Patriarch Bartholomew.²⁴

This raises the further theological question, “How can God (the Son) be abandoned by God (the Father)?” Chiara says that God has been abandoned by God, but she does not want to suggest in any way a lack of unity in the Triune communion. She is more interested in immersing herself and others in the absoluteness of the experience of this abandonment. In a letter to Father Raffaele Massimej, written from Trent on April 23, 1948, Chiara speaks of rendering invincible the unity of our soul with God and therefore with our neighbor. If only the world knew this secret, then the battles that she and others faced could be won. “Try, Father [Raffaele], to embrace him,” she urges.²⁵ These utterances nonetheless point to a paradoxical intra-Trinitarian event of “distance.” God is infinite and beyond space, but the metaphor of spatial distance is invoked in an analogical manner to signify the absolute depth of suffering. We too are called to follow Jesus into the depths of God. We relate to Jesus Forsaken with our soul inside the wound of abandonment.²⁶ *The Pupil of God’s Eye*

Here is the third key point that arises for the systematic theologian. Entering into the depths of God is where a spirituality of unity begins. When we receive the love of Jesus Forsaken, unity is generated. This unity is not something we create. It is a gift of

Jesus Forsaken.²⁷ “The book of Light that the Lord is writing in my soul,” Chiara writes, “is a page with two sides. One side of the page shines with the mysterious love of unity. The other side of the page shines with the mysterious pain of Jesus Forsaken. They are two sides of the same coin.”²⁸

There has to be more than sheer paradox to bring forsakenness and unity into a larger whole. This connection is to be found in the trinitarian pattern of God’s offer of salvation. The act of redemption is an act of the entire Trinity. Therefore, Chiara writes:

Jesus is Jesus Forsaken. Because Jesus is the Savior, the Redeemer. And he redeems when he pours out the divine upon humanity through the wound of his forsakenness, which is the pupil of God’s eye upon the world: an infinite void through which God looks at us: the window of God opened upon the world, and the window of humanity through which we see God.²⁹

Jesus Forsaken is the *empty* pupil of God’s eye and takes nothingness into his own being for the sake of our redemption. It is not a heroic deed that we can imitate. On the contrary, it is the very self-emptying of the Triune God into the nothingness of abandonment that makes the “space” for our redemption. This metaphor of the pupil goes beyond physical boundaries to a place of encounter in which we must empty ourselves to engage in the unity to which we are called by God.

24. Chiara Lubich, *The Cry of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2001), 63n4.

25. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 50.

26. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 26–27.

27. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 46.

28. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 47.

29. *The Cry of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken*, 136. See also Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 65.

Drawing on the Russian Orthodox thinker Pavel Florensky, we can reach a parallel insight. According to Florensky, to possess reality is to be known by God.³⁰ For Florensky, to know the Trinity is not just to possess conceptual knowledge, for such knowledge also entails a practical adherence to a new reality. The knowledge that there is one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a knowledge that comes in faith, but it constitutes to the same degree a life-changing experience. The church is where this experience is lived out.³¹ In the church we live out the truth that the Love shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the deepest and most universally available hidden reality of the world. The focolarini who live in the Spirit of Jesus Forsaken have some insight into the church as a space for the Spirit of Christ to take root and grow. The Spirit of Jesus Forsaken is constantly expanding, and this expansion does not occur outside of the institutional church but rather within it. This spirit of unity lends constant support to the church's families, parishes, universities, and bishops, and to its global mission of overcoming the boundaries of cultures and nations.

Mary Desolate

What about Mary, the mother of God? Where does she fit into this picture? Much has been written about this from the vantage point of Mary's desolation at the foot of the cross.³² Chiara brilliantly

30. L'Ubomír Žák, "P.A. Florenskij: progetto e testimonianza di una gnoseologia trinitaria," in: *La trinità e il pensare*, ed. Piero Coda and Andreas Tapken (Rome: Città Nuova, 1997), 218.

31. Žák, "P.A. Florenskij," 222.

32. Máire O'Byrne, *Model of Incarnate Love: Mary Desolate in the Experience and Thought of Chiara Lubich* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 2011). See also Brian K. Reynolds, "The Virgin Mary and Creation: From the Church Fathers to Chiara Lubich," *Universitas: Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture* 40, no. 10 (2013): 71–101, and

links the most sublime witness of the Mother of God with the most mundane affairs of the world. Consider an address that Chiara gave in 2003 at Castel Gandolfo to experts on the media.³³ As noted above, her concern for the means of communication is deep and long-standing. What is noteworthy about this meeting is her unique choice of topic: "Mary and Communication." Focolare, *l'Opera di Maria*, has always emphasized the centrality of a Marian faith, and Chiara gave the address during a Marian year.

What is genuinely surprising given the context—that is, a meeting with experts on the media—was Chiara's emphasis on Mary desolate, which, as far as I could tell, was aligned with the image that we have from Michelangelo's famous *Pietà*. Chiara focused on the pain-filled words and horrifying event at the scene of the crucifixion in the Gospel of John (Jn 19:26): "Woman, here is your Son." She writes: "If Jesus forsaken seemed to us to be the pupil of God's eye open onto the world, we can say that Mary desolate seems to us a kind of *camera obscura* taking in all that is negative in the world."³⁴ I was surprised by the radicality of Mary's agony as a dark chamber with a small aperture into which light enters. According to the optics of a camera obscura, light from outside the enclosed chamber passes through a miniscule hole and forms an image of what is outside on the back surface of the chamber. In the chamber, the world appears upside-down but is otherwise completely realistic and perspectively accurate. The Mary who holds the disfigured Christ is also the one who can gaze objectively at

Peter Casarella, "Virgin of Mercy: The Marian Profile in Twentieth Century Catholicism," in *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, ed. John C. Cavadini and Danielle M. Peters, 287–309 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).

33. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 298–303.

34. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 299.

the world in all of its disfigurement. Just as a photographic image is developed from a negative, Mary can hope for the redemption of a fallen world in the midst of her and the world's most complete agony. Jesus's mother is no Pollyanna when it comes to the state of the world. She teaches a thoroughly realistic path to love and justice.

How does Mary desolate function in everyday life? The lesson Chiara sought to communicate obviously extends beyond people in the media. The virtues of Mary desolate are refreshingly concrete. "Her example," Chiara writes, "will help professionals in communication see events objectively and remain firm in service to the truth even when inconvenient and sometimes at personal cost."³⁵ Beyond being the mediator of sheer honesty and a "monument of virtue," Mary desolate stands as "an icon of knowing how to lose"—a phrase that hardly makes for an effective advertising jingle in a world obsessed with tangible success. Apart from her Son, Mary had very little. When she lost him in his Passion, her loss was total and decisive. But she saw her loss for what it really was. The one who prepared all her life to be alone became Mother to each of us, to the whole world.³⁶ She is an example of the true and pure communication of the Word of God as a result of her "intense apprenticeship" under her Son, an apprenticeship she underwent her entire life.³⁷ Her love and her capacity for giving is human, real, and maternal. It consists of a unique capacity to bear the sorrow of the world in one's heart. According to Chiara, when a mother hopes all things for her child and puts up with all

the troubles involved, she sees farther than others.³⁸ At a university dedicated to Our Lady in which we all, faculty and students alike, are hardwired to our devices, this is a welcome and hopeful message.³⁹ We can learn to disconnect from our phones and screens and reconnect with others through Mary. Chiara Lubich, like Mary, has spent her life undertaking a similarly intense apprenticeship. Through the witness of her life and the gift of her words, we are called to live in the Spirit of Jesus Forsaken. Chiara teaches us to communicate our hope for genuine unity even where such unity is palpably absent in our daily lives.

A Saint of Dialogue and Silence: The Four Nights

Chiara Lubich is a saint of dialogue *and* a saint of silence. In a sense, all we have covered so far points to the underlying unity of dialogue and silence. We are not called by God to dialogue for the sake of filling up the room with our opinions. Dialogue grows out of our Marian silence before the Forsaken One and results in an attentive, Marian form of unity. Silence is therefore also a means to dialogue, if we become receptive to God and to others in this process of contemplating God's opening to humanity out of the void of Jesus's forsakenness.

This cross-fertilizing relationship between dialogue and silence becomes particularly relevant when Chiara talks about the doctrine of the four nights: the night of sense, the night of the spirit, the night of God, and the collective and cultural night.⁴⁰ The four nights bring together her entire approach to mystical theology,

38. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 296.

39. This is a reference to the audience at Notre Dame, an institution named by the Fathers of the Congregation of the Holy Cross after Our Lady.

40. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 171–76.

35. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 300.

36. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 302.

37. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 302.

recognizing with Karl Rahner that the Christian of the future will be either a mystic or not a Christian at all.⁴¹ They illustrate how her dialogue of silence is simultaneously profoundly personal and profoundly social.

What are the four nights, and how are they related to one another? The first two nights draw explicitly on the work of St. John of the Cross and his notion of the “dark night of the soul.” The first night involves our senses and our humanity.⁴² It occurs when we experience a long illness, the loss of a loved one, or big failures such as an economic collapse that directly affects us and our family. The first night is not restricted to physical pain, but it is a loss on the level of material existence in the widest sense.

The second night, the night of the spirit, she continues, “was experienced, for the most part, by all the saints who were mystics” and has two dimensions.⁴³ The first consists of the aridity and emptiness that characterize the absence of God. Mother Teresa, we now know from her posthumously published diaries, endured this form of aridity toward the end of her life.⁴⁴ The second dimension occurs when the person undergoing abandonment feels abhorred and eternally banished by God. Chiara insists that God illuminates and purifies the soul through “infused contemplation,” on account of God’s unfathomable and mysterious purifying love. The sense that God is punishing one’s spirit is actually an

experience of divine love and power. But Chiara has an even more important point to make about these two forms of mystical absence: sense and soul. Whereas other mystics and mystical traditions go at it alone, the Focolare undertake these nights with Jesus in their midst.⁴⁵ This insight of Chiara represents an extremely important point within the discourse about God today. The trials of this night are just as challenging as those of the first night and, paradoxically, still involve the sense of being tormented by God. But the burden is somehow softened because one has made a commitment in community to journey together from the hearth.

What happens when one then enters the third night, the “night of God”? In this case, we are talking about a pure apophaticism or negation of God, who, she maintains, silences the sense, the intellect, the will, memory and even the inspirations of God. Our life then is Jesus Forsaken. You live, like him, perfectly annihilated.⁴⁶ In the night of God, those journeying together not only allow God to enter into them perfectly as individuals but also are one in the forsaken body of Christ. This happens, she states, “when many people come together and only one speaks.”⁴⁷ Vertical self-emptying thus leads to horizontal communion of a radical sort.

With the fourth night, the collective and cultural night, we enter into the “darkness of our times.”⁴⁸ Every possible suffering, in particular in the spiritual realm, is encompassed by the epochal dark night of modernity that Saint John Paul II foreshadowed in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* and elsewhere. In a liturgy at Segovia in 1982, Saint John Paul II extended John of the Cross’s dark night

41. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 175, citing Karl Rahner from the Italian edition, *Nuovi Saggi* (Rome: San Paolo, 1968), 24. In English, one can consult Karl Rahner, “Christian Living Formerly and Today,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 7, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 15.

42. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 177.

43. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 177.

44. Mother Teresa, *Come, Be My Light: The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta”* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

45. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 178–79.

46. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 180.

47. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 180.

48. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 181.

to include the sense of autonomous self-abandonment undergone by the modern nihilist.⁴⁹ This bleak diagnosis nonetheless carries with it concrete tasks for the follower of Chiara Lubich. Specifically, Chiara calls upon the focolarini to dialogue with atheists, who do not believe in salvation, the resurrection to eternal life, or a future world. If one speaks to them about a crucified Jesus who appears to be only a man, then, without their realizing, a divine dimension will enter their souls and the society in which they live.⁵⁰ There is no sense of abandonment in the human heart or in our culture that cannot be reached by those who journey together with Jesus Forsaken. For that reason, Jesus Forsaken remains the key to unity.

Economy of Communion

I would like to conclude with two examples of the so-called undations, the waves of unity that have been sparked by the witness of Chiara. The first moves us into the realm of global unity in the area of economics, and the second brings us into the world of global youth. Both examples radiate from the same vision we have been examining: the evangelical dialectic of forsakenness and unity.

49. Liturgy of the Word held in honor of St. John of the Cross at Segovia on November 4, 1982: “El hombre moderno, no obstante sus conquistas, roza también en su experiencia personal y colectiva el abismo del abandono, la tentación del nihilismo, lo absurdo de tantos sufrimientos físicos, morales y espirituales. La noche oscura, la prueba que hace tocar el misterio del mal y exige la apertura de la fe, adquiere a veces dimensiones de época y proporciones colectivas.” See also the address of October 5, 1982, at the Fifth Symposium of the Bishops of Europe: https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pt/speeches/1982/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19821005_conferenze-episcopali-europa.html.

50. Lubich, *Jesus Forsaken*, 122.

The Focolare have a Mariapolis Ginetta, located near São Paulo, Brazil. This location includes a business park designed after the principles of the Economy of Communion. The place is named after its founder, since Focolare had been present in Brazil since 1958. The global proposal of an economy of communion has its origin in Chiara’s confrontation in 1991 with the disparity between the rich and the poor in Brazil, which occurred after her encounter with virulent Marxists in Italy (with whom she engaged in dialogue, of course) who claimed to have all the answers to the desires of the human person, body and soul.⁵¹

The Economy of Communion involves taking profits from a business and dividing them in three equal shares: 1) re-investment in the means of production, 2) donations to the poor, and 3) building up a culture of communion within the company and in the neighborhood of that enterprise. As Lorna Gold tells us, this third act is a response to Jesus Forsaken.⁵²

The “culture of giving” characterizes the human person as a being who is open to communion and to a relationship with the Absolute (God), with others, and with creation. Individuality and sociality converge in the gift of one’s being and in the circulation of material goods, which are needed for everyone’s growth and development. The verb “to give” is synonymous with loving in a practical way.⁵³ In establishing and maintaining a business within the model of the Economy of Communion, one is living Jesus in our midst in the realm of professional life and economic activity.

51. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 274–78.

52. See Lorna Gold, “From Spirituality of Communion to Economy of Communion,” in *Jesus Christ: The New Face of Social Progress*, ed. Peter J. Casarella (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 193–226.

53. Vera Araújo, “The Challenge of Giving,” *New City* (April 1994): 72–74.

There is no reason to separate this domain of one's life from one's spirituality. On the contrary, economic life and spirituality must be tethered together once again.

Blessed Chiara Badano

We conclude, then, with a final example of theology and holiness as inspired by our saint of dialogue, this one taken from the world of young people. Blessed Chiara Badano was a young woman who was a direct disciple of Chiara Lubich.⁵⁴ She lived from 1971 to 1990, and her feast day is October 29. She has been called the first person to be beatified from “Generation X.” Her parents considered young Chiara a true gift since they had waited eleven years to have a child. They knew she was called by God for great things. Like any girl of her age, she loved to sing, dance, and play sports—especially tennis. Hence, she has now become a patroness of athletes.

Chiara Badano was introduced to the Focolare Movement when she was nine years old. Focolare's emphasis on the forsaken Christ brought the young Chiara to later write:

I have discovered that Jesus forsaken is the key to unity with God. I want to choose him as my spouse and get ready for when he comes—to prefer him. I have understood that I can find him in those who are far from God, in atheists, and that I have to love him in a very special way, without any self-interest.⁵⁵

In the summer of 1988, the sixteen-year-old had a life-altering experience of Christ at a Focolare gathering, but her life changed even more when she arrived home. While playing tennis, she experienced a sharp pain in her shoulder, and after rounds of tests, she was diagnosed with bone cancer. Doctors said she had a rare and painful form of the disease. Chiara was filled with a profound trust in God's providence and was now realizing the extent of her desire to be united with the forsaken Christ. No complaining came from her. “It's for you, Jesus; if you want it, I want it, too,” she said.⁵⁶

Obviously, the strength and faith with which she faced her premature and painful death has much to teach us. So much did she desire to be united with Christ that she did not want her mental faculties to be diminished by pain medication. As a result, she refused it.⁵⁷ So much did she desire to be united with Christ in support and defense of the poor and vulnerable that when she was sick in hospital, Chiara chose to spend time going on walks with another patient suffering from depression rather than to rest in her own bed. With her hair falling out from chemotherapy, Chiara offered it to the Lord, “For you, Jesus.” She gave her all to Christ in her illness, saying toward the end of her life, “Every drop is a little like the blows of the hammer on the nails used to crucify Jesus.”⁵⁸ Her unity with Jesus Forsaken was complete. Chiara Badano did not fear death, because she was hopeful for her reunion with the Lord: “Don't shed tears for me. I'm going to Jesus, to start another life. I don't want people crying at my funeral; I want joyful singing. Yesterday I was at heaven's door, but it wasn't open.”⁵⁹

56. Zanzucchi, *Chiara Luce*, 49.

57. Zanzucchi, *Chiara Luce*, 42–43.

58. Zanzucchi, *Chiara Luce*, 46.

59. Zanzucchi, *Chiara Luce*, 46.

54. Michele Zanzucchi, *Chiara Luce: A Life Lived to the Full* (London: New City, 2007, 1st ed.).

55. Zanzucchi, *Chiara Luce*, 22.

Chiara Badano died in 1990 at the age of nineteen, and her final words were: “Bye, Mom, be happy, because I am.”⁶⁰ More than two thousand people attended her funeral. She was beatified twenty years later by Pope Benedict XVI.

Conclusion

We will be judged by our fruits, and my own judgment about Chiara Lubich as a saint of dialogue is that there are already many fruits. She was able to dialogue with the next generation, and one result of that dialogue was a very young saint who preceded her in going to the Lord. Chiara Lubich embodies a new path to theology and holiness, to theology as holiness, and to the holiness of theology. Chiara wrote:

If my words . . . have any value, it is to be attributed to the charism that the goodness of God wished to entrust to me: a gift of the Spirit which by its nature, as other similar gifts poured out on the human race, is meant to be given to everyone in the world who wishes to receive it.⁶¹

Chiara’s words are from the Spirit. Who is the Spirit who speaks to us through Chiara? It is the same Spirit who speaks in us when we cry out “Abba!” by virtue of our adoption as children of God (Rom 8:15). The focolarini are empowered to respond to the will of the Lord in the Spirit.⁶² The spirituality of unity fostered by the Movement comes from the Spirit.⁶³ The positive and

spiritually challenging idea of being nothing before the Lord is also a radical openness to his Spirit.⁶⁴ The Holy Spirit is a teacher to those who seek to live Jesus in their midst: “The Holy Spirit was making us understand that in order to bring about Jesus’ prayer ‘may they all be one in the world,’ it is necessary to consume in ourselves any form of abandonment, to welcome Jesus forsaken in any disunity.”⁶⁵ The same Spirit has given life to the movement to proclaim the notion of “mutual interdependence” to a multicultural and multiethnic world threatened by the atomizing, de-racinating effects of unrestrained globalization.⁶⁶ We pray today to Chiara so that she continues even now to share with us the gift of dialogue and unity that Jesus Forsaken handed to her.

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60. Zanzucchi, *Chiara Luce*, 53.

61. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, vi.

62. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 5.

63. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 28, cf. 43.

64. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 17.

65. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 26.

66. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 265.