

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, 19 February 1998

Interview with Chiara by Josè Maria Poirier
(Argentinian journalist from *La Nación*)

Journalist: Chiara, the first question would be on interreligious dialogue and with non-believers. What do you think would be the most specific contribution of the spirituality of unity in this dialogue with believers of other faiths or with people who claim to be non-believers when it comes to faith? I ask you this in the sense that... how does one face a dialogue that aims to be fully sincere and at the same time not betray their own faith?

Chiara: There is this fact, that Jesus by coming down on earth has redeemed the whole of humanity: every person. He also constituted the Church, but His redemption rained down on everyone, therefore everyone would have, if they live according to their right conscience, if they... have a proper conduct, according to a conscientious conduct they should have the possibility of being saved. Now this... we are very well aware of this, so we draw close to also these people of other faiths with this possibility, perhaps, to see them in Heaven tomorrow and us not.

So the attitude that we should have – and this is the point that we are aiming at – is that of loving them as Christ loved them, so to love them without any discrimination, giving to them all that love suggests us to do. And precisely because we have loved them, we made a huge discovery that almost all the major faiths: Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, have a formula that is typically Christian, because it is a phrase from the Gospel: “Do not do others, as you would not like done onto you.” They all have this and they call it “the Golden Rule,” precisely because all the Scriptures of every faith have it in common.

So what do you do? We go with our supernatural love - which is participation in the very love of God, in the life of the Trinity – they meet us with this other love that they have, which is not simple non-violence, but is really a positive attitude of love – perhaps its not supernatural, but it is good, perhaps it may also be supernatural, if they are in God’s grace, if they still have a bit... if they at least have some Holy Spirit – and in this encounter we build a fraternity that is not really unity in Christ, that which we can.. which can exist in the Church and among Christians, but it is a universal brotherhood which binds us together through love.

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Journalist: According to you, why has the charism of unity had such a stand in the whole world on very different cultural and social realities?

Chiara: Because God is the Ideal, and He has to do with everyone, He is Father of all, of all cultures, of all faiths, of all nations, of all vocations and of both sexes.

Journalist: What does the charism of unity signify for you personally, in your spiritual experience?

Chiara: It signifies – I must state this, because now its been years, its 53 years old – it has been a journey. I tried to assimilate it always more, always more, as I was able to, also making mistakes, beginning again, beginning again, making mistakes, going ahead, making progress. It has meant my journey towards God.

Journalist: There are perhaps two main discoveries in the spirituality: Jesus in the midst and Jesus forsaken. How would you explain to a person who has never heard about them, what is the heart of the experience of Jesus in the midst, what do you mean by Jesus forsaken?

Chiara: Well, Jesus in the midst is the fulfilment of a sentence of the Gospel where Jesus states that where two or more people are united in His name, which means in His love, He is present there. But it is also stated in other ways: “Where there is charity and love, God is there,” says a song ... and this is the realization of it. So it’s a really huge thing; that is, to have among us, perhaps in the family, in the office, also in the parliament, the presence of Christ in our midst, he helps us, he guides us, he enlightens us.

Jesus forsaken is the expression of the greatest pain that Jesus suffered on earth when at the height of his

cross he cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It can be explained because of the fact that he covered himself with all the sins of the world that had separated human beings from God and also amongst themselves. He took on all this separation so that he felt like crying out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, as though he himself was the voice of that humanity separated from God. So we find in him the solution to recompose unity in the different parts of the world, in all situations.

Journalist: What do you mean, or what does a collective spirituality mean according to the Ideal?

Chiara: It means that we do not go to God alone, but we journey together. Since our spirituality is based on love and, in particular, also on mutual love, which is the typical commandment of Jesus – he called it his and new – naturally in mutual love we are at least in two because we need to... there is reciprocity, so it is not a journey made on our own, but a journey taken together.

Journalist: And according to you, how should one aim at unity in the cultural field, in respect of traditions that are so different?

Chiara: We really need to know how to respect, but it is love that illuminates us, that allows us to understand the other person, in fact, that makes it possible for each one to be enriched by the treasures of the others, so it is an enrichment. We say that we must become citizens of the world, in the sense of being in touch with all people in an attitude of being enriched by the others’ treasures, and naturally also by sharing the treasures that we have in us, but there are no obstacles for those who love.

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Journalist: And what is the foundation for the dialogue that you propose among peoples, and that you bring ahead in the Movement, between people of different cultures and religious faiths?

Chiara: With regards to the different faiths, also with non-believers, we have an on-going dialogue because we see that even if they do not believe in God, in the transcendental, they believe in certain values. Now, since Jesus is the man-God, there is a human part and a divine part in the one person of Christ, also all the purely human values have a meaning in Christianity and we feel that if we can offer them our spirit, our spirituality, which is then summed up in one word - love, they can truly offer us the experience of having lived, appreciated and of having worked for many values such as solidarity, peace, unity and sometimes freedom. This is it.

Journalist: A question that I see as very important to ask an expert on spiritual life is: what meaning can suffering have in the life of a person?

Chiara: A great meaning, a great meaning. The cross is the equilibrium of humanity. If we are without the cross, we would flitter here and there like butterflies who do not know where to rest; while suffering is what gives us meaning. Not only, but it is the straight means of reaching union with God. Whoever suffers, if they go deep in their hearts, generally find union with God and union with him is the basis for living in a Christian manner, to also be able to live humanly.

Journalist: How can we aim at unity in diversity?

Chiara: Well, precisely what I said before: we have to respect others, we have to love others, to allow them to be who they are: but to live this, we must not exist ourselves in order to enter into their world. As someone says, we need to step into the other person’s shoes, a writer once said that we need to step into the others’ shoes in order to understand how he or she understands things. And so in this... in this way there is unity, because we make ourselves one with the others, and perhaps the other person makes him/herself one with us, and there is diversity... a bit like between the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity who are so different: the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, and neither one or the other is the Holy Spirit, and yet they are one because they are all love.

Journalist: ... From your profoundly Christian and Catholic experience, you found in the deep dialogue

with other faiths that God brought you to, riches that you did not yet know, or do they all beckon something that was already in you?

Chiara: No, no, I found things that I did not yet know but simply because, as was said to me also today, we believe, also in past centuries, to have discovered Christianity, but we have discovered Christianity only up to a certain point; in the next few centuries we will discover Christianity on an even greater level, then even deeper and even deeper. Now people in certain faiths have arrived like this, simply through their religion, but most certainly also with the help of the Holy Spirit, to some depths in certain particulars which we have not yet reached, but which we will then find are 'seeds of the Word'; that is, there too are also principles of truth, a presence of the Word of God, that perhaps we have not yet discovered. I don't know, to give an example: I was in Thailand and I found such a wisdom, such asceticism, such detachment from oneself, that it's difficult to find here.

Journalist: Thank you, Chiara.