

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, December 7, 1971

Chiara to the Italian focolarini:

“Jesus forsaken” (Part I)

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First, an episode preceding our history.

The first focolare house did not exist yet; I had not yet met my first companion. I was a teacher, and one day a very zealous person approached me in the schoolyard. She was running a youth group and had succeeded to attract the youth to religion through recreation, music, and story-telling.

She asked if I could speak to them, and I said yes. "What will you speak about?" she asked. "Love," I said. "*What is love?*" she went on, interested. "Jesus crucified," I answered. This may have been the very first time in my life, when not yet a focolarina, that I spoke of him.

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Thus, the Crucified One made himself known early on in the life of the first focolarine requiring us to imitate him in order to express our love for God concretely, as can be seen in a letter I wrote, perhaps in 1944:

I share with you a thought, which sums up our whole spiritual life:

Jesus crucified!

He is everything.

He is the book of all books.

He is the summary of all learning.

He is the most ardent love.

He is the perfect model.

Let us choose him as the only ideal for our life.

It was he who led Paul to such sanctity.

May our souls, needing to love,

keep him always before us, in every present moment.

May our love not be sentimentalism,

nor a mere external action,

but conformity (to him).

At about the same time, however, to the adjective "crucified" we added "forsaken."

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A priest said to us that Jesus' *greatest suffering* was in the moment he cried out on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34).

The opinion among Christians at that time placed it, rather, in the suffering of Gethsemane. But having great faith in the words of the priest as a minister of Christ, we believed the suffering of the forsakenness to be the greatest.

The famous biblical scholar, J. M. Lagrange, explicitly confirms this by calling it "a more complete desolation than that of Gethsemane since Jesus no longer says, 'my Father,' but 'my God' *Eloi, Eloi.*"

Meeting that priest, through an external circumstance, was, as we can see now, God's response to a prayer we had made. Fascinated by the beauty of Jesus' testament, we first focolarine, all

united, had asked him, in his name, to teach us how to bring about the unity he asked of the Father before he died – as he saw it should be.

After all these years of life, the Movement has learned and experienced that what makes unity possible is this very love for Jesus crucified and forsaken.

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The pain of Jesus' being forsaken by the Father, the mystery of Jesus' intense and piercing love for people, was starting to penetrate us, to make itself known, to attract us, to draw us to love it.

He was beautiful, this God-Man, by love reduced to a rag, to shame, "to nothingness," as the psalmist says: "*Ad nihilum redactus sum...*" ("I am brought to nothing," Ps 73(72):22). He was reduced to nothing (St. John of the Cross): expelled from earth and heaven in order to bring us into the kingdom as coheirs with him, filled with his light, his love, his power; overflowing with dignity, exalted.

He had *given everything*.

First, a life lived beside Mary in hardship and obedience.

Then, three years of mission, revealing the Truth, giving witness to the Father, promising the Holy Spirit, and working all kinds of miracles of love.

Finally, three hours on the cross, from which he gave forgiveness to his executioners, opened paradise to the thief, gave his mother to us, and ultimately gave his body and blood, after having given them mystically in the Eucharist.

He had nothing left but his divinity.

His union with the Father, that sweet and ineffable union with the One who had made him so powerful on earth as the Son of God and so regal on the cross, that feeling of God's presence had to disappear into the depths of his soul and no longer make itself felt, separating him somehow from the One with whom he had said to be one: "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30). In him love was annihilated, the light extinguished, wisdom silenced.

"The Logos," says von Balthasar, "in whom everything in heaven and on earth is summed up and possesses its truth, himself falls into the dark... into the absence of any connection with the Father, who alone upholds every truth, and therefore into a concealment, the very opposite of an unveiling of the truth of being... (the Father).

"The Word's vessel is empty, because its source, the Father, the mouth who speaks, is sealed up. The Father has withdrawn. And the words of the forsakenness, shouted in the dark, are like still water....

To formulate a question was the only way Jesus could then possibly express himself; that loud cry is the Word which is no longer word, which therefore, cannot be understood and explained as word. It is the indescribable reality which is so beyond what words that are uttered in the created world can express. It is the sub-word; that which is chosen by the Powers of Heaven to bear the Eternal ultra-word.

"The inarticulate cry of the cross of Jesus is no denial of his articulate proclamation to his disciples and to the people... instead it is the final end of all those articulations... which he utters with the greatest force where nothing articulate can be said any longer."¹ What these theologians say is beautiful!

He compromised himself with humanity, made himself sin with sinners; he had signed a check of infinite value, which no one could pay but him. Jesus paid for us; to make us children of God he deprived himself of the feeling of being the Son of God.

Now the Father was permitting this darkness and infinite aridity of the soul, this infinite nothingness.

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¹ . H. U. von Balthasar, *Il tutto nel frammento* (Milan, 1990, pp. 247-249).

So he made himself nothing to make us share in the All; a worm² of the earth, to make us children of God.

We were cut off from the Father. It was necessary that the Son, in whom all of us were represented, should experience separation from the Father. He had to experience being forsaken by God so that we might never be forsaken again.

He had taught that no one has greater love than one who lays down his life for his friends. He who was Life laid down his whole self. This was the culminating point, love's most beautiful expression. He loved in God's way! With a love as big as God!

Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful was this divine love for our souls!

He fascinated us, and perhaps we fell in love with him because, from the very beginning, we started seeing him everywhere. He presented himself to us with the most different faces in all the painful aspects of life. They were nothing but him, only him. Though new every time, they were simply him.

(Applause)

² . Psalm 22(21): 6: "But I am a worm, less than human."