

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, 23 November 1977

Chiara's contacts with Pope Paul VI

Interview to Chiara by Jean-Claude Darrigaud for the book *Toute soif a son eau*

Jean-Claude: What was your relationship with Paul VI before he became Pope and now as the responsible of our Church.

Chiara: My contacts with Paul VI came about very simply from this fact: Eli, one of my first companions, is a relative of Paul VI's brother. And one day, in our focolare in Rome, I had spread a slogan around, which is a saying that is well-known: "*Nulla dies sine anima*", "No day without a conquest." So Eli thought about it and said: "How can I conquer a person today? Oh, right, I know Bishop Montini, let's go and visit Bishop Montini."

So Eli went to Bishop Montini and began some small talk with him, telling him what we were doing, the events that were happening. Then she went back with other friends of mine, till Bishop Montini said: "But can I get to know this Chiara?" So then I also went.

I immediately understood that he was an exceptional person. I told him everything, all that was taking place. We also would call him, once even at 11 o'clock at night; so from this emerged a kind of friendship and esteem. What he admired about the Movement was the faith, this great faith.

And I remember that once I really vented with him – but he understood me – by saying to him: "But look, Monsignor, what are all these beauties of Rome? What are all these monuments, all these works of art, these mausoleums – I remember saying – what are they? Nothing in comparison to Jesus in the midst; nothing in comparison to Jesus in the midst."

And he agreed, and later I heard that he was happy, very happy with this. So much so that, even though we were still being studied by the Church, he managed to arrange an audience for us with Pope Pius XII, who asked, precisely, who was the animator. So I was able to shake the Pope's hand, he gave us a small gift and then we left.

When he became Pope, he wished to..., he granted me an audience, which I did not ask for. Someone else asked for it. During that first audience, my impression was immediately very clear: that of no longer finding myself in front of Bishop Montini, but the Vicar of Christ. So, not the same person as before and something more.

He wanted me to tell him at what point our Movement was at as it had already been partially approved by Pope John XXIII. When I reached the point of telling him about our non-Catholic Christian brothers and sisters, I saw that he paid special attention to this and was very, very interested. He told me that whatever I wished to convey to him, I could go to him directly. And he told me – in presenting him with such a varied Movement, since then it already had many expressions, with many sections, branches, which entered into the convents of nuns and friars, among priests, everywhere. It could not be configured to any other existing work in the Church – and he told me: "Tell me everything, because here nothing is impossible."

In his words I felt wisdom, and I had the impression of being in front of Jesus on earth. This was such a strong impression – I always repeat it – that I had the distinct impression that the roof of that office where the Pope welcomes people, his study, was no longer there, but that heaven and earth were joining together.

This was the first time. Then I went back a number of times for different reasons and each time, however, even if I went for other reasons which regarded these ecumenical activities, or matters which

regarded the Church, I always had something to share with him about our Movement, because always new branches were developing and so... I needed the Pope's approval. And he himself, personally, wanted to take it upon himself and give his approval himself, without our passing through the Congregations, because we were approved directly by the Holy Father.