

(English translation)

Payerne (Switzerland), 26 September 1982

Unity

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The various spiritualities that have arisen in the Church throughout the centuries (I'm speaking of Catholic spiritualities because I'm more familiar with these, but certainly the same applies to spiritualities in other Churches) the various spiritualities can be expressed with a single word, simplifying matters a little.

For example, for the Franciscan spirituality, we could say "poverty", even though this does not express everything. For the spirituality of the Jesuits, we could perhaps say "obedience". For the spirituality of St. Theresa of Avila, "prayer". So with one word, we can express a spirituality, a spiritual current in the Church.

Now, without comparing ourselves to the saints, because there is no comparison, we can express our spirituality, that of the Focolare Movement, with one word: "unity". Unity is really the word that sums up our spirituality. But we must clarify something here.

Who can bring about unity? Unity is essentially, truly the work of God, only of God. Unity is something too great. Unity is the ideal of Jesus. He came on earth to accomplish unity, the unity of all people with the Father through him, and of people with one another. It is the ideal of Jesus. He is the one who brings about unity. And the Church, which continues Christ, with the grace of God, brings about unity between people and God and people with one another.

Therefore, we are not able to accomplish unity. Unity is the work of God. It's a gift of God. It's a grace of God. So what can we do? We can respond to this universal vocation of all people to unity. We can do our part so that unity truly triumphs in the world. Indeed, it is essential that we do our part.

Are there any particular signs which tell us that our Movement is really called to help people build unity? In order to single out these signs, as our superiors in the Church have always suggested we do, let's go back to the beginning of the Movement, almost forty years ago – this is the thirty-ninth year – almost forty years ago, to see if there are signs of a call to unity, if there are episodes, if there are events or writings. Well, to tell the truth, two episodes in particular come to mind at once.

I remember that I was with the first focolarine in a cellar – it was during the war, and we always brought the Gospel with us. That time we opened the Gospel right to the 17th chapter of John, Jesus' prayer for unity. We were just girls, like our gen today, and we read that page all the way through. To our amazement and surprise, we felt that we could understand those words, even though they are among the most difficult of the Gospel. We had the impression that they had been lit up one by one and that we could understand them.

What we immediately understood was this: that page was the "Magna Charta", the program of the newly-born Movement. At that time we didn't even call it a Movement – the program of that something that was coming to life.

A few days later we gathered around an altar – there were six or seven of us – now there are many of us here – and there we asked Jesus for the grace to teach us how to bring about unity and if it were his will, to make us instruments of unity.

Then slowly, little by little, it seemed that the Lord suggested to us the first ideas on how to build unity. These are important and now I'm going to share them with you so we can all leave here knowing how to build unity.

These ideas are written on a small sheet of paper that we still have. Many things have been burned and destroyed, but this set of notes has remained – notes of a brief talk we used at that time among

ourselves. In these notes we find this idea: that we must always go beyond a purely human way of seeing things and look at all people in a supernatural way.

If we look at Jesus with the eyes of little children, we can see that basically he asked only two things which are ultimately one: that all people, everyone – black and white, rich and poor, ugly and beautiful – all people are children of the one Father and are brothers and sisters to one another.

This is the first idea, the first idea that can already revolutionize our souls if we are sensitive to the supernatural: universal brotherhood which frees us from all forms of slavery, because we are slaves of the divisions between rich and poor, between nationalities: father and children; between black and white, between races; between nationalities, even between different cantons or counties of the same nation. We are slaves, we criticize one another, and there are many obstacles and barriers.

No, the first idea is to free ourselves from all these forms of slavery and to see in everyone, in everyone... "Even in my little boy? Even in that woman who talks too much? Even in that elderly man who doesn't make any sense? Even in that poor person? Even in that other person? But is it possible?" Yes, in everyone, in everyone, in everyone. We must see them all as possible candidates for unity with God and for unity with one another. We must open our hearts and tear down all the barriers. We must put into our hearts universal brotherhood: I live for universal brotherhood! (applause)

So then, if we are all brothers and sisters, we must love everyone. We must love everyone. We must love everyone. Look, these are just a few words, but they bring a revolution! We must love everyone. "Even that woman who lives next door... but she criticizes me, she looks down on me, what a character!" Yes, her too. We must love everyone.

Those same notes contain some very useful ideas which tell us how to love everyone. It is written there that we must love every neighbor. But which neighbor? The one who passes by us in the present moment of our lives. So we're not talking about a platonic love, not an idealistic love, but a concrete love: my neighbors now are you; your neighbor is me, and your neighbor is the person sitting next to you or in the seat behind you. We must love not in an idealistic way or in the future, but in a concrete way and in the present, now. We have to love. We have to love.

Someone might ask, "How should we love? What is Christian love? What's it like? Here, there is a word which really makes us think. It's from those initial notes which contain the first inspirations from God. One little word is underlined and it might scandalize you, but it's there: the word is humility, to strive for the primacy of the Gospel by putting ourselves at the service of everyone. To love means to serve. Jesus gave us the example.

First of all by his death on the cross, he served all humanity – of the past, present and future. But then he also gave other examples, as when he washed the feet of his disciples. He was God! We've got to realize this – he was God and he washed our feet, the feet of men. So we too can certainly wash the feet of our brothers and sisters. It's not that we can, we must!

This is Christianity: to serve, to serve everyone, to see in everyone our masters. If we are servants, the others are masters. To serve, to serve, below, below – try to reach the primacy of the Gospel, yes, but by putting ourselves at the service of everyone. So this is a second idea that can revolutionize the world.

Christianity isn't a joke. Christianity is something serious! It's not just a little bit of polish, a little bit of compassion, a little bit of love, a little bit of almsgiving. Ah, no, no. Ah, no, no! It's easy to give alms so as to have a clear conscience and then to criticize that one, criticize that other, to command, to oppress.... It's easy. Instead, no, no.

And there, in those initial notes, there is a sentence..., a sentence which is really true because then it came about. It says, "If a small group of persons, even a tiny group of persons were true servants of Christ in their neighbor, soon the world would belong to Christ." You might say, "It's impossible, it's impossible." I'll try to explain this to you now, because it's not impossible.

Those notes explain very well how we should serve, what we should do to serve. You might wonder, “Do I really have to bring him a jacket if he doesn’t have one? Do I really have to bring the plate to the table?” Listen, listen. First of all, the service that Jesus asks of us is not an idealistic service. It’s not a sentiment of service. If you study the Gospel, you’ll see that Jesus spoke of a concrete service: with our muscles and legs and minds – we must serve really – it’s not just something idealistic.

In any case, to serve well, those notes mention three words which are fantastic and we must never forget them. They are: “make yourself one,” make yourself one with the others. Make yourself one. It’s fantastic! What does it mean? In modern terminology it would be like this: “Let’s live the other person,” that is, let’s not live in ourselves any longer, thinking only about ourselves... let’s live the other – his feelings – try to penetrate the other person’s feelings. His burdens – try to carry his burdens. His joys, try to share his joys. Make yourself one. “How can I do it with the children. They want me to play with them?” Play with them. Make yourself one in everything, everything, everything except sin – not in sin, no. Make yourself one.

You may say, “But what a waste of time to stay there watching that television program! What a waste of time taking that walk!” No, it’s not a waste of time. It’s all love, it’s all love, it’s all love, and then it’s all time gained because we must make ourselves one out of love. If today, all of you, all of us would bring away with us this idea alone: to make ourselves one out of love, that is, selflessly, we would be happy enough.

We should make ourselves one out of love, not to win them over to Christ, not even for that, not even for supernatural interests, nothing! Make yourself one, make yourself one. Besides, I’ve noticed that by living in this way with people who do not want to know about Jesus Christ, etc., this making ourselves one with them – sharing their suffering and pain – do you know what the result is? These people come back because they feel free and we continue to make ourselves one, make ourselves one, until, until, until....

This making ourselves one demands that we die to ourselves because we can no longer live for ourselves. We must live for the others, for the others. But this dying to ourselves is life in us, is Christ in us. So then if Christ is in us, on our death, little by little, sooner or later, all will be drawn to Christ. Jesus said, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself.” “I shall draw all men...”

So then, we too, when we relive Christ, when we are another Christ, when our ego is raised up on the cross, that is, when we have killed our old self in order to allow Christ to live within us, then little by little, everyone is conquered, and this is the great experience of the Focolare Movement.

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What happens when people are won over? They too want to love. They too want to make themselves one with everyone, and they try to make themselves one with us too. What happens? Now there are two of us making ourselves one, two of us making ourselves one with one another, two of us loving one another really as Jesus wants.

Jesus wants us to love one another to the point of dying for one another. He doesn’t want us to love one another waiting to die tomorrow or the day after or next year. He wants us to die now. He wants us to live dead, dead to ourselves because alive to love. He wants us to live dead.

When two people meet and love one another in this way, then something extraordinary happens, something extraordinary! Just as when two elements combine and cause a third element, which is not the sum total of the two elements but something else, when Anthony and Michael love one another in this way, in this way, with this measure of love, being ready to die for one another, when Anthony and Michael love one another like this, what happens? There is a third element!

It is no longer Michael plus Anthony, Anthony plus Michael. It’s not a mixture of two persons nor a group of two or more persons: it is..., it is... Jesus! It is Jesus! It’s Jesus! It’s something wonderful! “Where two or more are united in my name,” says Jesus (which means in this love, in Me, in this love) –

“I am in their midst” which means: in them. Two or more who love one another in this way bring into the world, generate in the world a flame: Christ himself, Jesus himself, the same Jesus, the same Jesus. It’s fantastic!

I remember when we had our first experiences in this way of loving, which I wish for everyone, especially for those who have just met our Movement today. We were surprised, enchanted. We used to say, “Oh, unity, unity, what divine beauty! We have no words to describe it. You can’t explain it. It’s Jesus. You can see unity, you can feel it, you can enjoy it with the senses of the soul, but you can’t express it. It’s indescribable like God. You realize what unity is especially when it is missing – it’s as if the sun has gone down.

And unity, which is the presence of Jesus in our midst, brings his spirit, the spirit of Christ with all his fruits, which are: peace, a peace never, never, never experienced before; a joy never known before; a desire to love; a spirit of heroism; light: it makes you understand. It helps you to interpret events better. It is the Spirit who guides, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. Wherever there is this unity, there is the Spirit of Jesus with all his fruits. It’s wonderful! It’s wonderful! (applause)

Someone might ask, “Would you explain more about this presence of Jesus?” You see, before leaving this earth, Jesus said, “Behold, I shall be with you always, until the end of the world.” Behold, I will stay with you, I will stay with you. Where is Jesus now?

We know where he is: he is in his Body, which is the Church. He is with Christians because he dwells within Christians, especially with those who proclaim him. He is present in the successors of the Apostles. He is in the Eucharist. He is in the poor, the sick, the weak. He is in his word, the word of God, it’s Jesus.

He is also in the community united in his name. He is here, he is here, he’s in the community gathered in his name... “Where two or more” – this is a sentence very much loved by our brothers and sisters of the Reformed Church: “Where two or more... I am there in their midst.” Jesus is there.

Today, in our times, there is a very special sensitivity to this presence of Jesus. Paul VI said so when he affirmed that today the world does not listen so much to teachers as to witnesses, that is, to those who first act and then speak. Paul VI also said that if people do listen to teachers it’s because first of all they are witnesses.

We can understand this by looking, for example, at how Mother Theresa of Calcutta is listened to wherever she goes. Why? Because she has a reality to back her up and so she is listened to and accepted. The same applies to other witnesses of our times.

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How often we feel that we want to renew the structures of our Church, of both the Catholic Church and the Reformed Church, for example, or also of the Old Catholic Church. Why? Because they are good structures – the parish and the diocese – but there is not always the spirit of the early Christians, unity, the communion of goods, that fervor, that adherence to the word of God.

Let’s bring Jesus into the structures of our Churches. Let’s bring Jesus into our religious orders and congregations. How often these beautiful buds in the Church don’t blossom fully because the sun is missing, love is missing. If we bring love, we’ll see wonderful things happen, a garden in the Church.

How often our families are broken by separations, divided by arguments, by divorce and all these things. Let’s bring Jesus in the midst and we’ll see the splendor of families which John Paul II calls “little churches” shine forth again. Let’s bring the presence of Jesus among our Churches: the Catholic Church, the Reformed Church, the Old Catholic Church - let’s bring Jesus in our midst. Let’s show how true it is that what unites us is much more than what divides us because we have baptism, we are all children of God.

But we must love one another and then Christ will be in our midst, even among the various Churches or ecclesial communities. He will be present and he will already bear witness to unity. Then the others who do not know Christ will believe in him. At times they are really scandalized by our separation.

They believe that Christ is dead because we are divided. But in seeing these Christians who are going towards complete unification and who are even now very united because of Christ in their midst, these people will believe in Jesus and say, "Truly, they have the truth."

This is my wish... (applause)

We should leave the hall with this proposal. First: I want to love everyone. Second: in order to love them I want to serve them, below everyone, to have the primacy of love. Therefore, I want to make myself one with everyone and bring the presence of Christ in our midst in the world, in this small Switzerland. Yes, on the one hand it is small, geographically, and on the other it is very rich in many, many values and founded on a saint, St. Nicolas of Flüe, who undoubtedly wants the sanctification of his Switzerland

So let's start working. Let's bring Christ. Let's bring Jesus. Let's bring God. For him nothing is impossible. "Be confident," he said, and he repeats it to us, "I have overcome the world." Then we will see that springtime predicted by Pius XII, and the civilization of love that Paul VI spoke of.

We will see our small Switzerland journeying along that "way of life" as our present Pope John Paul II described this Ideal of unity. Life and not words, life, life. And we know that life is Christ – Christ here in our midst so that Christ may be present in as many places as possible all over Switzerland.
(applause)