

(English translation)

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Address for the honorary doctorate in Sacred Theology

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Your Excellency Gian Vincenzo Moreni, Apostolic Nuncio,
Your Eminence, Jaime Cardinal Sin,
Reverend Rodel Aligan, Secretary General,
Reverend Maximo Marina, Vice-Secretary General,
Mr. Rodolfo Clavio, Registrar,

This day has arrived on which you wished, in your goodness, to confer upon me a doctorate in Sacred Theology.

Although amazed and still incredulous, I would like to express my heartfelt and profound gratitude.

Does theology have anything to do with me personally, with the task I am carrying out at the service of the Church?

Ladies and Gentlemen, you will be able to draw your own conclusions if you will kindly listen to something of my simple story.

I will begin simply by narrating about my youth, when my ideal was studying, especially philosophy. Searching for the truth with ancient and modern philosophers was what fully satisfied my mind and my heart.

But, having received a Christian education and moved, perhaps, by an impulse of the Spirit, I realized quite soon that it was, above all, one profound concern that stirred my interest: to know God.

I was convinced, therefore, that attending a Catholic university would have satisfied this longing of mine.

However, since it was not possible for me to begin such studies due to the uncertain economic situation of my family, I entered a contest which was offering a scholarship to a limited number of girls in Italy.

Great was my disappointment when I learned that I was not in the number of winners; broken-hearted, I shed all my tears.

While my mother was trying to console me, something rather unusual happened. In the depths of my soul, a subtle voice seemed to say: "I will be your teacher!" I immediately felt at peace again.

I was a practicing Catholic and received Holy Communion daily.

Then one day, a new understanding.

"How can it be," I asked myself, that you are searching for the truth. Isn't there someone who said that He Himself is the truth in person? Didn't Jesus say of Himself: 'I am the truth'?"

This, then, was one of the first reasons that prompted me to search for the truth not so much in books, but in Jesus.

And I decided to follow Him.

Meanwhile—this was in 1943—Providence had brought the first seeds to bloom of what would later develop into the Focolare Movement.

I had continued my studies at the state university, but due to the increasing demands of the newly-born Movement, I found myself suspending them as many as fourteen times and taking them up again. Until one day, I put my beloved books in the attic once and for all.

One book, however, remained: the Gospel.

In the midst of the raging war, my friends and I brought it with us to the air-raid shelters, where we read it. We were surprised to find that those words, heard so many times in the past, acquired deep meaning, unusual splendour; they shone out as if there were a light beneath them all. They were different from all other words, even from those which can be found in the best spiritual books. They were universal words, therefore suited to everyone: young people, adults, men, women, Italians, Koreans, Ecuadoreans, Nigerians....They were eternal words, for every epoch, therefore, also for ours. And they could be put into practice. Indeed, inscribed with divine forcefulness, they pressed people, as it were, to translate them into life.

While all the Gospel attracted us, to the point of considering it to be the rule of the newly-born Movement, that light (today we can say, that charism) led us to underline and to make our own especially the words which would constitute the foundation stones of a new spirituality in the Church: the spirituality of unity.

Before listing them, however, I would like to point out two singular episodes from those earliest days.

The first is this.

One day as we first focolarine met in a cellar in order to shelter ourselves from the dangers of the war, we happened to open the Gospel to Jesus' solemn prayer to the Father (John 17).

"Father," we began reading, and we had the impression that we could somehow penetrate the meaning of that passage which was humanly speaking beyond our grasp; above all, we felt certain that we had been born for that page of the Gospel. It would be the *magna charta* of the new Movement.

The second episode.

Due to a particular circumstance, God had focused our attention on a specific aspect of the mystery of the cross: on the abandonment of Jesus.

As affirmed by mystics and theologians, that was His interior passion, the apex of His sufferings, the drama of a God who cries out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"¹

In our youthful generosity, we decided to follow Him for the rest of our lives.

Coming back now to the main ideas taken from the Gospel as foundation stones, they were:

God, the new Ideal of our life who manifested Himself in the midst of the horrors of the war, fruit of hatred, for what He truly was: Love;

doing the will of God and living His word as our possibility to respond to His love with our love;

love of neighbour, especially the needy, as the commandment which sums up all the law;

radically fulfilling Jesus' characteristic new commandment;

taking upon ourselves the cross, every personal cross, that of our brothers and sisters, and that present in the Church or in humanity;

accomplishing unity with Jesus and with our neighbours, as understood in His prayer for unity;

living with the presence of Jesus among us, promised to those who are united in His name and that is, in His love.

Besides these points, there is that of nourishing ourselves daily with the Eucharist, the bond of unity; living the Church, especially as "communion"; imitating Mary, "Mother of unity," in her desolation; allowing ourselves to be guided individually and collectively by the Holy Spirit, Love personified in the Trinity and bond of unity also among the members of the Body of Christ.

This brought about in the Church, perhaps for the first time, a spirituality that is more communitarian than individual, which allowed not only individuals to reach perfection, but a number of people, indeed, the people.

¹ Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46

And it was a form of sanctity—as we are discovering—surprisingly attuned to our times.

“The figure of the saint ... will always be greatly honoured...” Paul VI had said when he was still a Cardinal, “but ... today, the Church tends towards a sanctity of the people.”²

And John Paul II recently affirmed, in speaking to Bishops, friends of the Movement, that a spirituality which is both personal and communitarian together, is a ‘constitutive’ element of Christian life and therefore, also for Bishops.³

The Archbishop of Trent in northern Italy, the birthplace of the Movement, blessed it, discerning the hand of God in this new phenomenon of his diocese.

Not everything, of course, was easy. The Gospel causes love but also hatred, and God’s enemy too, does not just sit back and let the Gospel bear its fruits. However, with the blessing of the local Church and then of the universal Church, everything went ahead and developed. With the passing of years, a vast Movement was born and has spread all over the world, with millions of adherents. Well-ordered by the Spirit, the whole forms a Movement which, alongside others of our times, attests to the fact that the advent of a new springtime in the Church and in the world, foreseen by Popes, is not a utopia.

Always aware and convinced that what is born in the Church must be in full communion with the Magisterium and Tradition of the Church, a couple of decades after the Movement’s birth, towards the sixties, we wished to compare the main points of our spirituality, as they were understood and lived, with what had been said by the Fathers of the Church, the Councils, saints, Popes, and great theologians.

We joyfully discovered a marvellous consonance which confirmed that we were, although in our own specific way of thinking and acting, one with our Mother, the Church.

This resulted in a deeper and more illuminated understanding of all her doctrine; an immersion in it which has helped to form each one of us more and more—we hope—as Church-souls.

In more recent years, we realized that from this life, from this personal and communitarian experience and the related asceticism and mysticism, a doctrine is taking shape, which is always anchored in the eternal truth of Revelation, but which develops and renews the theological tradition.

The presence in the Movement of a well known, profound and modern theologian of Germany, Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, now deceased, and of lay focolarini men and women, as well as priests and religious who are professors or experts and who while living in the Movement have never completely abandoned their studies, but have enriched themselves year after year with true and profound culture illuminated by the charism of unity, offered the occasion to open a kind of School that would study this doctrine: the so-called Abba School.

Furthermore, it was not the first time that something like this was happening in the Church.

Didn’t the Spirit draw out a new doctrine from the experience of St. Francis, entrusting this task specifically to St. Bonaventure, to Blessed Duns Scotus? And isn’t St. Thomas Aquinas the theologian of the order founded by St. Dominic, besides being the “doctor communis”?

Thus, if it is lawful for us to compare ourselves with such great realities, also for us (since it is not so much us but God who is at work), after almost fifty years of life, we saw the beginning of similar prospects.

We have studied and we continue to study. We study the experience we have lived throughout these years. We consider it in the light of Scripture and the great tradition of the Church.

We also study many intuitions or illuminations covering the vast range of our faith—intuitions which it seems the Spirit suggested to us, especially in 1949, a time not very distant from the beginning of the Movement.

² G.B. card. MONTINI, *Discorsi su la Madonna e su i Santi* (1955-1962), Milano 1965, p.499-500.

³ Cf JOHN PAUL II, Audience on 16.2.1995, to a group of Bishop friends.

But what are the principal cornerstones of the theology that is emerging from the charism of unity? I would like to recall some of them here, although these certainly do not exhaust the lines of in-depth study and research that are being undertaken.

The principal cornerstones are God-Love, unity, Jesus crucified and forsaken, and Mary.

God-Love, first of all. What John Paul II said of the spirituality given to us by God holds true for our theology as well, namely, that its first inspiring spark was love.⁴

Clearly, it is not just any kind of love, but agape, the love of God, the Love that is God. The departure point of our experience and of the theology that emerges from it is therefore the same as that of Christian faith itself: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is Love” (1 Jn 4:16).

The originality of Christian revelation, which discloses the unprecedented depths of God’s self-revelation in the Old Testament: “I am who am,”⁵ at the same time bringing to unexpected fruition the seeds of the Word dispersed in the various religions, was contained in this New Testament confession of faith: “God is Love.”

Love, therefore, is not only an attribute of God, but it is His very Being. And because He is Love, God is One and Triune at the same time: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus, above all in the paschal event of His passion, driven to the annihilation of the abandonment and death, which yields the resurrection and effusion of the Spirit, reveals to us the Being of the Trinity as Love.

The Father generates the Son out of love, He is “lost” in the Son, He lives in Him; in a certain sense He makes Himself “non-being” out of love and for this very reason, He is, He is the Father. The Son, as echo of the Father, returns out of love to the Father, He is “lost” in the Father, He lives in Him, in a certain sense He makes Himself “non-being” out of love and for this very reason, He is, He is the Son. The Holy Spirit, who is the mutual love between the Father and the Son, their bond of unity, in a certain sense also makes Himself “non-being” out of love, and for this very reason, He is, He is the Holy Spirit.

Closely linked to this first cornerstone is the second: unity.

As I said earlier, from the very beginning of the Movement, we were overpowered by the words of Jesus’ prayer of unity: “As you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (Jn 17:21).

Seeking to put these words into practice, we discovered a light pouring out from them which illuminated God’s design of love for humanity.

Jesus—we understood—is the Word of God made man in order to teach men and women to live according to the model of the life of the Trinity, that life which He lives in the bosom of the Father.

He did not stop at pointing out and closely connecting the two central commandments of the Old Testament: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”⁶ He taught us the commandment which He Himself does not hesitate to describe as “my commandment” and “new,” with which it is possible to live the Trinitarian life on earth: “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”⁷

The commandment of mutual love lived out and measured against Jesus’ love for us, to the point of the abandonment which consumes us in one in Him, defines the heart of Christian anthropology—as the Second Vatican Council underlined⁸—the vision of the human person revealed to us by Jesus.

⁴ Visit of John Paul II to the Focolare’s international headquarters, Rocca di Papa, August 19, 1984; cf “Città Nuova”, n° 17, 1984.

⁵ See Exodus 3:14

⁶ See Mt 22:37-39

⁷ See Jn 13:34; 15:12

⁸ See Gaudium et Spes, 22, 24

When we live the new commandment seeking to receive the gift of unity in Jesus, which comes to us from the Father, the life of the Trinity is no longer lived only in the interior life of the individual person, but it flows freely among the members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Thus the Mystical Body of Christ can become in fullness what it is through the grace of faith and the sacraments, especially through the Eucharist: the presence of the risen Christ in history, who relives in each one of His disciples and in their midst.⁹

And now the third cornerstone: Jesus crucified and forsaken.

The Holy Spirit Himself, we believe, even before making us penetrate the mystery of unity, focused our faith and our exclusive love on Jesus who, as I said before, in a climax of love and suffering, cries out from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46).

It is the moment in which He experiences the deepest separation that can ever be imagined: in a certain sense He experiences being separated from His Father with whom He is and remains one. This is the way He gives to all men and women a new and fuller unity than the one they had lost through sin: He gives them unity with God and among themselves as a participation in His unity with the Father and with us. He is therefore the key to the comprehension and actualization of unity.

In order to achieve unity, it is necessary, in fact, to remember and to love Jesus forsaken (this is how we called Jesus in this mystery which summarizes and is central to his redemptive mission); it is necessary to love Him in a radical way, like St. Paul, who affirmed: “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).

Furthermore, in His abandonment, Jesus made Himself—as Scripture says—“sin,”¹⁰ “cursed”¹¹ in order to make Himself one with those who were far from God.

For this reason, Jesus crucified and forsaken really seems to be the God of our times: the divine answer to the abyss of trial and suffering deeply cut in the human heart by the atheism which pervades so much of modern culture; by the poverty of millions of underprivileged; and by the quest for meaning and ideals on the part of the disillusioned and confused new generations.

Jesus forsaken is the God of today also because He is the image of the division that exists between the Churches, a division we are more conscious of in our times. Discovering His countenance in these divisions is precisely what gives us hope to be able to cooperate in a vital way towards reunification.

In particular, we seem to understand that in Him “who was God and emptied Himself”—as Paul writes in the letter to the Philippians, (see 2:6-7)—a providential way is opening for dialogue with the religious traditions of the East, and this represents one of the most committing and urgent frontiers at the dawning of the third millennium.

Finally, Mary. We feel that she cannot be merely a theme among others of our theology, important as they may be.

Perhaps because ours is her Work, the Work of Mary; perhaps because today many signs of the times and authoritative words of the magisterium speak to us of the emerging “Marian profile” of the Church; perhaps because we witness the singular phenomenon of the figure of Mary being recognized by other religious faiths, we can see the heralding of a new and original season of mariological reflection.

In it, we believe, the reality of Mary should be explored in the context of God’s global design of salvation for all humanity and for the cosmos.

Mary, in fact, as John Paul II said recently, is “an integral part in the economy of communicating the Trinity to the human race.”¹²

⁹ See Mt 18:20

¹⁰ See 2 Cor 5:21

¹¹ See Gal 3:13

¹² John Paul II, Mary’s relationship with the Trinity, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, n.3, Jan.17, 1996

She is the Mother of the Word of God made man, which places her in an extraordinary and unique relationship with all of the Most Holy Trinity.¹³

This, above all, is the real greatness of Mary, which “magnifies” the greatness of God and His works.

But Mary is also Mother of the Church. As she generated the Son of God in the flesh through the work of the Holy Spirit, similarly, having shared in a unique way in the Redemption through her desolation at the foot of the cross¹⁴, she participates efficaciously in the regeneration of the sons of God brought about by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Church.

Mary, now in heaven, in God’s design for her completely fulfilled, is the flower and first fruit of the Church and creation, which in her is already Christified, divinized. In a certain way, we can think of her as being set into the Trinity, through grace, as icon and expression of all creation.

Because there is in God a perfect perichoresis¹⁵ between the three divine Persons, and because, through Christ, in the Spirit, there is also a perichoresis between the Trinity and humanity, apex and synthesis of creation: “You loved them even as you loved me” (Jn 17:23)—all creation, recapitulated in Christ, is also destined to be, as Mary already is, eternally set into the Trinity: that is, to live and rejoice infinitely in the intimate life of God, in the ever new and unending dynamism of the trinitarian relationships.

As I hope can be understood from what I have said, the doctrine which springs forth from this charism of unity, gives the impression of peering into the centre of Revelation.

Our theologians, in fact, quoting von Balthasar, recall that: “Charisms like those of St. Augustine, St. Francis, St. Ignatius can receive, given by the Spirit, glimpses into the centre of revelation, glimpses which enrich the Church in a very unexpected and yet everlasting way. They are always,” continues the great theologian, “charisms in which intelligence, love and discipleship are inseparable. This shows that the Spirit is at once divine wisdom and divine love, and in no case pure theory, but always living practice.”¹⁶

First of all, these professors point out that the people who deepen their understanding of this doctrine—perhaps because by constantly seeking to live in accordance with this charism of unity, they remain united in the name of Jesus, so that He is present among them, and because they are nourished daily with Jesus in the Eucharist—can in a special way participate in Him or, as St. Augustine says, be made one with Him.¹⁷

Therefore, an innovation which seems to emerge from the charism lived in this way is that the theology which results here is not only a theology about Jesus, but a theology of Jesus: of Jesus present in and among theologians.

They observe, in fact, that the predominant line followed in Christian reflection has been that of looking to Jesus above all as the object of theology. Obviously, there was always the awareness that such an object—the Son of God made man—required an adequate knowing subject, that is, reason illuminated by faith, a Christified reason.

Nonetheless, with the exception, we believe, of the theology elaborated by theologians who were also charismatics and often saints (for example, limiting ourselves to the Western tradition, theologians like St. Anselm of Aosta, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, and even earlier, the Fathers of the Church obviously, from the East and the West), generally, theology in the West, especially in the recent past, has been more of a reflection on God and on Jesus, a knowledge, therefore, almost “from without,” rather than from within the mystery being considered through participating, in faith and love, in the knowledge that Jesus has of the Father. “No one knows the Son,” said Jesus, “except

¹³ See Lk 1:35

¹⁴ See Jn 19:25-27

¹⁵ Perichoresis: the movement of love among the persons of the Trinity

¹⁶ *Teologica*, III, Jaca Book, Milan, 1992

¹⁷ Augustine, in *Jo.Ev.*, tract.21:8-9; PL 35, 1568-1569

the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him” (Mt 11:27).

And this is a knowledge which is given by Jesus, through His Spirit, to His Mystical Body, which is fully received when we are “one”¹⁸ in Him, almost one “*mystica persona*.”¹⁹

Thus, through this charism of unity, the necessary condition is present for the rebirth of a great theology of Jesus: clearly, not the Jesus of 2000 years ago, but the Jesus who lives today in the Church.

This leads to a second innovation. Since this theology is the theology of Jesus who *ascended into the bosom of the Father*, who lives today in the unity which is the Church, it would be characterized by a perspective point of unity, of *One*, that is, of God, in whom everything is in its true reality.

Therefore, it would be “*one*” perspective, next to others, which would not exclude the others; on the contrary, it would presuppose and give value to the others. At the same time, it could also offer an original contribution, that of harmonizing them because it could lead them to unity, illuminating them in a new horizon.

Furthermore, since in a certain sense, as we already mentioned, it is a theology of Jesus, in whom all created realities are recapitulated, it would shed light also on the various sciences, making them truer, more authentic.

Indeed, we can dream that theology would return to being the mother of the other sciences and why not, even the queen, although in a different sense from that intended in the Middle Ages, not destroying their legitimate autonomy, but leading them back to their true root and their true end.

Reverend Rector, Your Eminencies, Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen, since the doctorate which has just been conferred upon me is motivated by the theology of the Focolare Movement, I sought to spend some time on this subject. I hope it has been helpful.

Thank you again.

Chiara Lubich

¹⁸ See Gal 3:28

¹⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, De Ver. 29,7 ad 11.