

Transcription

(For simultaneous translation)

Castel Gandolfo, June 9, 2000

The Movement for Unity and a Politics of Communion

Address at the Focolare international convention for politicians

Honorable Senators and Deputies,
Representatives
of the Italian Government,
Political Authorities present
from various nations
Eminent Professors,
Ladies and Gentlemen, friends,

We are here today to open the International Congress of the Movement for Unity: an important step toward defining its identity, the ideals it pursues, its methods and its goals.

It is a very young Movement which began on May 2, 1996, on the occasion of a meeting I had with a group of politicians in Naples, Italy. But its roots sink deep into the history, spirituality and doctrine of the Focolare Movement which promotes it. In fact, we have always given special attention to the world of politics because it offered us the possibility of loving our neighbor in a crescendo of charity: from interpersonal love to an ever greater love towards the polis, the city. Many of our people have become involved in politics, often holding positions of responsibility.

In 1944, during World War II, we, first focolarine, remained in the city of Trent while our families evacuated. As we ran for cover in the air-raid shelters, we could take with us only one small book, the Gospel. Aware that each meeting could have been the last, and in the face of war-torn dreams, broken lives and crumbling houses, we searched for an Ideal that would never die, an Ideal for which it was worthwhile spending our lives, and God revealed himself to us as Love. As Love because God is a Trinity of Persons who love one another and to whose communion of Love we are all called. Love which had to be our life, too, for we were children of God who is Love. Love which had to be given to others, to people who needed spiritual support and comfort, but also food, shoes, clothing, houses – all goods which because of hatred and selfishness, were destroyed or unavailable.

By responding in this way to the love of God, that is, by loving our neighbor, we gave life to a small community in the city of Trent. In living the words of the Gospel, this community found solutions to the social problem and brought new order to the lives of all.

A religious Movement was coming to life supported by a charism that would lead to the fulfillment of the “dream of a God,” as our young people say, unity. “Father, may they all be one” (see Jn 17:21), Jesus had prayed. A religious Movement which soon proved to have a political relevance as well.

Today I would like to review with you the events of our history that have most contributed to the formation of our political thought, underscoring in each event that which constitutes a lasting value and which can contribute, it seems to me, to the heritage of the Movement for Unity.

In 1948 we first met the Honorable Iginio Giordani in the Chamber of Deputies. He was a leading figure with vast cultural, social and political experience, an apologist during the first years of the difficult postwar period, a scholar and a reference point for the generations that longed for freedom during the years of dictatorship. Giordani was a co-founder of the Focolare Movement and for us, he has always

represented, due to a special plan of God, the dimension of humanity, with its history, its sufferings, its achievements, its quest for an authentic ideal.

He opened our heart to humanity, to its problems and aspirations: the rebuilding of Italy and the rest of Europe in the wake of World War II, the rising democracy, the East-West division. In turn, Giordani received from the spirit of the Movement a new impulse for his own political activity. We can see this in his talk on universal peace which was applauded by the entire Parliament; the first bill on conscientious objectors which he presented together with the Socialist, Calosso; the dialogue on peace and disarmament with the Communist, Laiolo.

Quite soon, a small group of politicians began to gather around Giordani. They shared our ideal of life and sought to live it in Parliament.

There, for the first time in a political setting, they experienced that art of loving I spoke about on a particular occasion a few months ago.

It is an art which requires that we love everyone without exception, regardless of their party affiliation; that we be the first to love; that we make ourselves one in order to take in the others, emptying ourselves of our worries, our thoughts.

Christians are the first, but not the only ones, called to live this art of loving: everyone can and must love. It is a law for every believer of whatever faith. It is in the DNA of every human being.

If love becomes reciprocal – according to Jesus’ commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you” (see Jn 13:34) – he becomes present among us, as he promised: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name (in my love), there am I in the midst of them”(Mt 18:20). It is a presence of Jesus which transforms people individually and creates unity among them. It is not simply an agreement on the course of action to follow or opinions based on the same political choice, but that human-divine unity which unites in a deeper way, beyond differences of culture and political membership. On the foundation of unity, differences acquire their true meaning, and in reciprocity, they become a common enrichment.

Therefore, the norm is still, first of all, to live as true Christians, and then as people engaged in politics.

In view of the fact that people of other religions and cultures also participate in the Movement for Unity, such a commitment can be formulated as follows: first, be people who believe in profound and lasting human values, and then take political action.

The presence of Jesus among us, effect of unity, is the heart of all our communities, and likewise of our political communities. Member of Parliament, Tommaso Sorgi sensed the need for this in 1962.

He wrote to me from the Chamber of Deputies: “We who live at the very core of this ‘blessed’ public life constantly experience that on a purely human level – even on the level of the most noble ethical values – there is no hope of redemption for this narrow-minded world of insincerity, conflicts, and power struggles. Unfortunately, we note that even religious values are unable to change the *homo politicus*, who accepts them only to the extent that they prove to be useful, and puts them aside as soon as they get in the way (...). Individual achievements alone (...) prove to be insufficient. We need the brilliant light of Wisdom to awaken all of humanity (...).¹

Such light of Wisdom can come only from God who, in Jesus, attracted by our mutual love, becomes present among us in our workplaces, and through us, he himself takes political action.

This was the purpose of the group we referred to as a “parliamentary action cell.” Its members have changed since 1950 – at a certain point also deputies of different parties came – but its goal has not changed, and that is, to bring the presence of Jesus in Parliament, through our unity.

VIDEO end of Part 1 – start of Part 2

¹ . Tommaso Sorgi, Unpublished letter to Chiara Lubich, Teramo, Italy, February 7, 1962.

Another noteworthy presence which underlined the political significance our Movement might have had was that of Alcide De Gasperi, originally from Trent like the first men and women focolarini. He was very close to our Movement.

The spirituality of unity, which he knew quite well, fascinated him and reinforced in him that vocation to unity which, together with Adenauer and Schuman, made him a founder of the United Europe.

Especially in his final years – as emerges from a documentary on his life – all his thoughts converged, in a sense, into these words of Jesus: “May they all be one,” that Jesus whom he invoked three times before dying.

In our contacts with De Gasperi we realized how much can be done by a politician who loves his country and how much this can cost him.

Correspondence began with De Gasperi, and in one of my letters from 1950, I had written: “You are as important to us as the presence of Jesus among us, because we are convinced that all authority comes from God (...). You have the grace of state to govern Italy (...); you should be the most luminous expression of your own party and of others.”

This letter gave me the opportunity to explain how we viewed authority even then.

We know that it is God who gives human beings – as his vicars in the world – authority, which should be an instrument of truth and love (see Jn 19:11). This is why we have always had a very keen sense of authority.

However, considering that it comes from God who is Love and who is Trinity, authority acquires a meaning which is not always easy to find in political doctrines and codes of law. We look at authority as a participation in the love of the Creator for each one of his created beings, in the love of a Father for all his children, even the weakest and most insignificant, but who bear the undeniable dignity of being children of God.

This authority that God gives to every person (see Gen 2:28-29) is then the source of a more specific political authority, that is, the authority to govern human society.

However, it is important to keep in mind the tremendous responsibility that those who govern have before God and before the people. They must never forget that the citizen is the first partaker in God’s love for the city and each one has a role to carry out, conscientiously using his or her rights and duties; that the citizen has a place of action in the political community, and as such, must act accordingly. Political power must be at the service of the citizen, as is often and everywhere stated.

So that this may be truly accomplished, the political activity carried out by those in government as a service of truth and love, must be matched by the growing participation of its citizens in public affairs, as an expression of the authority they received from God. Only in this reciprocity is it possible to build the good of the whole community.

In this context we think of the trinitarian relationship between the two elements, which means harmony of unity and multiplicity.

In the Movement we certainly do not want to mix religion and politics, as happened and happens in the case of Christian and non-Christian fundamentalists. The specific nature of politics, with its own particular field of competence, must be recognized.

On the other hand, Jesus is Life and complete Life. He is not only a religious fact.... Separating him from the whole life of human beings is a real heresy of the present times, and makes people a slave to something that is less than themselves and relegates God the Father far away from his children.

No, he is the Man, the perfect man who sums up in himself all men and women and every truth and drive which they may feel in order to be raised to their rightful place.

At times there is the tendency to think that the Gospel cannot solve every human problem but is intended to bring about the Kingdom of God understood only in a religious sense. But it is not so. It is certainly not the historical Jesus who resolves all the problems. This is done by Jesus in us, members of his Mystical Body, Jesus in me, Jesus in you... It is Jesus in the person, in that given person – when his grace and love live in that person – who builds a bridge, who opens a way. Jesus is the true, most

profound personality of every person. Every person gives his or her particular contribution in all fields as another Christ, whether it is in science, in art, in politics.

Our politicians had earnestly set out in this direction, and in 1959, the “St. Catherine Center” was formed. For almost ten years, this Center was the point of convergence for their aspirations and concerns and the point of departure for their activities, renewed in the spirit of unity and reinforced by the in-depth study of the principles of Christian social doctrine.

However, from the perspective of the St. Catherine Center, politics is not just the pursuit of the common good of citizens from a purely material point of view. It also has to work towards building a society that is open to more elevated goals.

Politics could and had to prompt each person to assume his or her responsibility as a member of a body, which is the whole of humanity, and offer him or her the opportunity to attain on earth that self-fulfillment and happiness which is possible only in the context of universal brotherhood.

In addition, emphasis was given to the fact that Christians must be aware that what they accomplish, in communion of purpose with all those who seek the good of humanity, builds up the earthly city and continues the work of the Creator. At the same time, it draws them nearer to the “new heavens” and “new earth” (2 Pt 3:13), because Christ redeemed the cosmos and human works as well, which will remain if they are accomplished in conformity with the commandment of love.

While broadening the commonly accepted view of political commitment, and encouraging its members to set their daily choices into a wider historical perspective, the St. Catherine Center also examined, in the light of the truth present in the human heart, the political laws that had withstood the test of time in order to confirm their validity. And our people involved in politics did not feel alone; they sensed the active presence and help of those who throughout the course of history had contributed to accomplishing the same objective. In addition, it urged them to study new laws that could emerge from relationships strengthened by mutual love among people, among groups and among nations.

Furthermore, there has always been the conviction, confirmed and rediscovered in new forms every day, that the Providence of God is never lacking, but acts in human affairs, and therefore, also in political matters.

These are some of the ideas that the Movement for Unity inherited from the St. Catherine Center.

But one basic idea lies at the foundation of everything and guarantees the success of our politicians as they continually strive to live the ideals they pursue. We offer it to those of you who are Christians. But not only, because Christ died for all people on earth.

We already stated that what is needed first of all is to be authentic Christians and on this foundation, to carry out one’s activity in politics. Very well, being authentic Christians means following Christ by living what we have called “the art of loving”; but also, as he himself said using strong words, by denying ourselves and taking up our cross.

Our cross. What is the specific cross of those who live in the political world today? I think it is often the lack of unity, of harmony, that makes their task heavy and seemingly fruitless; the rigid, unbending contrasts among parties, in which the opinions of the other are not understood; divisions caused by ethnic groups within States, divisions among States, and so forth.

We have to find the way to overcome these disunities, to restore unity.

VIDEO end of Part 2 – start of Part 3

Jesus himself had come on earth to restore the unity lost between human beings and God and the unity lost among human beings. He did it through his passion and death, above all – this is the conviction of theologians and saints – when he experienced within himself the greatest possible disunity: the disunity between himself and the Father with whom he was one. And he cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46).

This mystery is the key that opens unity to the members of the Focolare Movement, and also to that specific reality of the Movement which is the Movement for Unity.

Only people who always keep before them the image of Jesus crucified and forsaken, who recognize his countenance in every division, who love him and embrace the cross of division out of love for him, are capable of recomposing unity.

And it is by loving Jesus crucified and forsaken that they obtain the gift of an extra-ordinary strength and a light which the mind does not produce on its own.

The Focolare Movement gradually spread throughout the world: in 1956 the volunteers were born; they are people who are deeply involved in social issues. While Hungary was being invaded by the troops of the Warsaw Pact, we felt prompted to promote another kind of invasion, one with a similar determination, but which takes an entirely different direction: that is, the desire to bring a revolution of love into everyday life, into families, into workplaces, and into cultural, social and political endeavors.

The volunteers are the main animators of the so-called New Humanity Movement which coordinates all the members of the Focolare Movement in terms of their role as members of society.

Throughout these years, it has given rise around the world, to a people in the real sense of the word, the people of unity, which today counts millions of people, and which is beginning to have a novel impact on various fields of human learning and activity: in economics, politics, art, justice, communication, and so on. This people is made up of adults and young people, even children, people of all cultures, professions, and countries. The academic, civic and political recognitions which prestigious universities and international institutions have conferred upon me are, in reality, recognitions given to the life of this people and to its presence in this moment of history.

There has always been an awareness, from the earliest days of our Movement, that the charism of unity contains its own culture, a culture which is the fruit of Christian tradition, but at the same time, a new culture, because of the light brought by the charism. But it was the growth of the people of unity, the spreading of the charism outside the structures of the Focolare Movement, that highlighted the specific characteristic of this culture and led to the study of its doctrine: in theology, but also in philosophy, politics, economics, psychology, art, and so forth. This is what is being done now for the past ten years by the group that we call the *Abba School*, which engages, together with me, experts in different disciplines.

And now the latest innovation: the encounter between the people of unity and its doctrine has produced what we call “inundations” or “rivers of living water,” according to an expression used by St. John Chrysostom: that is, the development of authentic new movements, particularly in the field of economics, through the Economy of Sharing, and in politics, through the Movement for Unity.

Thus the Movement for Unity, which is a continuation of the St. Catherine Center, brings a new political culture.

But its vision of politics does not give rise to a new party. It changes the method of political activity: while remaining faithful to one’s genuine political ideals, a politician of unity loves everyone, as we said, and therefore, in every circumstance, searches for what unites.

Today we would like to envision politics perhaps as has never been done before: we would like to give life – let me dare to say – to a politics of Jesus, embodying what he wants and can do through us wherever we are: in the national and regional governments, in the town councils, in the parties, in the different civic and political groups, in the governing coalition and in the opposition. Then unity, lived among us in this way, must be brought into political parties, among the parties, into the institutions, into every ambit of public life, into relationships among states.

Then each people will be able to cross its boundaries and look beyond, loving the country of others as its own, so that the presence of Jesus will become a reality also among nations and states and make humanity one universal family, but one that goes beyond the limited concept of an international society, because the very relationships among persons, groups and nations are conceived in a way that dismantles all types of divisions and barriers.

This is the goal of the Movement for Unity which is beginning to blossom in different parts of the world, a Movement capable of giving rise to new endeavors and of appealing to politicians of all levels and positions. The members of the Focolare are present in the Movement for Unity in the exercise of their

profession or civic commitment, together with many other people who have come into contact with the Ideal of unity and who live it, even without actually belonging to our Movement.

Let's try now to understand more about the specific characteristic of the Movement for Unity.

We know that the redemption won by Jesus on the cross interiorly transforms all human bonds, imbuing them with divine Love and making us all brothers and sisters.

This is very meaningful for our Movement, if we keep in mind the great political project to obtain "liberty, equality, fraternity," as summarized in the motto of the French revolution. However, while the first two principles have been partially achieved in recent centuries, fraternity, in spite of the formal declarations, has been all but forgotten in the political arena.

Instead, this could be the very characteristic of our Movement: fraternity; through it, freedom and equality could also acquire new meaning and greater fulfillment.

Let me take a moment now to explain the great importance that the figure and role of Mary has had in the history of our Movement.

In 1959, as we always did during those years, all the people of our community spent their holidays together. That year, in the little town of Fiera di Primiero in the Dolomite mountains, twelve thousand people from twenty-seven countries, spent time there with us: with a solemn act, representatives of these nations consecrated themselves and their nations to Mary. Also the members of parliament who were present consecrated their political commitment.

Why this choice of Mary, and why do we consider her as the Queen of all nations and leader of our Movement?

Mary is the one who sings: "The Mighty One has done great things for me" (Lk 1:49). God sets his plan for humanity in her: in her he reveals his mercy for humankind, destroys the false projects of the arrogant, throws down the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the lowly, reinstates justice and distributes riches.

Who, then, is more a political figure than Mary?

(...)

Chiara Lubich