

## ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Trent, June 10, 2001

Open meeting in the city of Trent

Chiara: “Those who drink the water will think of the source” (37’)

(Remarks from Dr. Pacher, the mayor of Trent, and Archbishop Bressan)

Chiara: Therefore, “Those who drink the water will think of the source”.

Your Excellency, Mr. Mayor, dear fellow citizens, ladies and gentlemen, friends, I want to thank each and every one of you for all you did to facilitate this return of mine to Trent, which as I have been telling everyone, has given me very special joy.

As you may know, I have been invited today to develop a theme that has a rather mysterious title: “Those who drink the water will think of the source”. It’s taken from a Chinese proverb.

Obviously, the first question that comes to mind is: what kind of water are we talking about? And where does it come from?

We are talking about the water that signifies the light, love and power of the Holy Spirit, which is present in one of those gifts called “charisms”. From time to time, the Holy Spirit sends these gifts to the Church, so that it can meet the needs of humanity at that time and can confront and resolve the problems of that particular era, which Pope John XXII called the “signs of the times”.

Very well, 58 years ago, one of these gifts was bestowed right here in this city. Therefore, the wellspring of the water we are metaphorically speaking about is in our city of Trent.

And because the Lord is pleased to place his gifts in the hearts of simple, poor, and fragile men and women, making them his instruments, so that his power may be all the more radiant, he chose me, in this city, and with me a small group of young women, followed shortly afterwards by some young men.

At this point, another obvious question arises: how did this gift of God, this charism manifest itself? It’s easy to answer! What I am going to tell you is a true story. It has been repeated by me and my companions thousands and thousands of times all over the world, but in this city it has the realism and fascination that true stories always have.

It’s a story that began in 1943, the year it officially began. The Lord gradually indicated to us the necessary steps we needed to take to understand our personal and communal vocation, which was to live the spirituality of unity. The spirituality of unity is synonymous with the spirituality of communion, which, as I explained in the

Cathedral last Saturday, the Holy Father, John Paul II, through a mysterious coincidence, has now presented to the whole Church in his recent apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte*. (“At the beginning of the new millennium”).

I will speak especially about the initial period of our Movement and how it began, because it took place right here in Trent. I’ll premise it by telling you two significant episodes.

The first time I sensed the presence of a gift of God, of something new that was happening within me, but that did not come from me, nor from my own intelligence (I tell this and all that follows only for the glory of God) was when I was 18 years old. I had an immense desire in my heart: I wanted to know God.

I was living with my family in Via Gocciadoro, number 1. I had graduated from Antonio Rosmini teacher’s college in Via Verdi and wanted to start university. I thought that if I went to a Catholic University, I would find someone who would speak to me about God, who would teach me about him.

Since my parents were not able to help me financially during that period, I entered a scholarship contest, but due to an apparently adverse circumstance, I was unsuccessful. I remember, as if it were yesterday, that I cried my heart out, and my mother couldn’t console me.

It was in that very moment that a certainty came into my soul, as if Someone were reassuring me from within, telling me, “I will be your teacher”. I immediately stopped crying. I went on with my life and enrolled in a public university in Venice.

Now, many years later, I can affirm that the One who seemed to be speaking to my heart did indeed keep his promise. He did so by sending a gift of the Holy Spirit, a “charism”, which caused the birth of the Focolare Movement.

A year later, I was invited to attend a course for Catholic students in Loreto, in the central part of Italy, where a large fortress-like church guards the little house of the Holy Family of Nazareth, transported there during the period of the crusades.

I attended the course in a college along with all the other girls, but as soon as I could, I would run over to visit that little house. I knelt down beside the wall blackened by the smoke of the lanterns and something new and divine enveloped me, almost crushed me. My thoughts contemplated the life of those three virgins. I thought, “Mary must have been here. Joseph would have probably crossed the room from this side to the other. The child Jesus in their midst would have known this place well, having lived here for years. The walls must have resounded with his child’s voice...” Each thought weighed down on me and pulled at my heart; I couldn’t hold back the tears. I ran back over there at every interval in the program. The life of those three virgins, Mary and Joseph, with Jesus in their midst, irresistibly attracted me.

When I returned to Trent, to Castello in Val di Sole, where I was teaching, I met the children and the parish priest who saw how happy I was. He asked: “Have you found your way?” “Yes,” I replied. “Marriage?” “No.” “The convent?” “No.” “Will you remain a virgin at home, in the world?” “No.” I understood that it was something new, but I didn’t know anything more.

In Loreto, I had seen a model, a vision, the first idea, I would say, of what the focolare would be, in which it would be indispensable to have Jesus present spiritually among us, because of our constant mutual love, just as he was physically present with Mary and Joseph.

Four years passed. It was 1943. While carrying out an act of love for my mother (going out on a bitter cold day, in the place of my younger sisters, to buy milk in the neighborhood of Madonna Bianca on Via Verona), about half-way there, it seemed to me that the heavens opened up above me and that Someone was inviting me to follow him: "Give yourself completely to me". I immediately spoke about this with my spiritual director who allowed me to consecrate myself to God forever. We could say that it was the first stone of the spiritual edifice of the Focolare Movement that would come to life.

In the meantime, the friendship in God continued with those young people with whom I shared the first intuitions, or inspirations, at the beginning of the Movement. On whom did we focus our attention, as this new life began to stir within us? We focused on all the poor around us, all those in need.

I was still living at home on Via Gocciadoro. I do not know exactly what it was that impelled my companions and I to go out with such zeal to visit the poor people of our city. Perhaps it was the sentence of Jesus: "Whatever you did to the least of these, you did it to me" (see Mt 25:40).

I can't forget the rather long corridor in my house filled with all sorts of things that could be of use in wartime: cases of jam, cans of powdered milk, sacks of flour, clothes, medicine, firewood... everything arrived from who knows where! Undoubtedly from the Providence of God.

I remember that we had very little time, because all of us were working or going to school. So, right after lunch, we would set out for the three poorest neighborhoods in the city: Laste, Portella and Androne. Each of us carried two full, heavy suitcases.

We would climb up dark flights of stairs, old and dangerous, eaten away by time and vermin, into almost total darkness, into desolate situations which pained our young hearts. And we would find a room without light, with a poor man or woman in bed, lacking everything. But... it was Jesus! We would sweep the floor and wash everything in the room, we would console them and make promises in the name of Almighty God. On one occasion, Dori, one of us, after giving a thorough cleaning to a woman's house, caught an infection that produced sores all over her face. But she was happy even then because she had done all of that for him, for Jesus.

Whenever a poor person would come to our home, we would choose the best tablecloth, the best dishes and tableware. When we went out, each of us always carried a little notebook and our hearts would jump for joy whenever we met a poor person. We would approach them with great love and ask for their name and address, so that we could go back and help them later, too.

Yes, because for us, although our immediate concern was certainly to help each individual person in need, from the start we did so with a very precise plan in mind: we

wanted to resolve the social problems of our city. God did not let us see anything beyond that. It was almost as if, once we accomplished that, we would have done everything. But the Lord had another plan for us, as I will explain.

In the meantime, the horror of World War II was destroying everything, so that many people were evacuating the city, fleeing into the mountains. Then on May 13, 1944, a bomb hit my house, making it impossible to live there any longer. My family and I had escaped to the Gocciadoro woods, an area which at that time was nothing but forest.

That night we slept on the ground, out in the open, and what I remember of that night can be summed up in two words: stars and tears. Stars, because throughout the night I saw them moving across the sky above me; tears, because I cried, knowing that I wouldn't be able to leave Trent with my family whom I loved so much. I could already see in my companions the Movement that was coming to life and I couldn't abandon them.

To make me understand his will on that occasion, the Holy Spirit seemed to put in my mind words I had studied at school: *Omnia vincit amor*<sup>1</sup>, love conquers all. Could love for God conquer this too? Could I, the sole economic support of my family, let them go off on their own? I had to, and so, with the blessing of my father, and as they left for the mountains, I went back towards the devastated city. I remember that at a certain point, on 3rd of November Avenue, a woman who was desperate came running up to me. She grabbed me by the shoulders and yelled: "Four of my family were killed! Four of them!" I tried to console her the best I could. In that moment I understood in a way I will never forget, that from then on, in the place of the suffering I felt for having left my family, I would have to carry in my heart the suffering of humanity.

I searched for my companions on Via San Martino in the houses and on the streets, reduced to ruins. They were all alive, thank God. Someone offered us a small apartment in Piazza Cappuccini. The first focolare? We didn't know it, but it was indeed the first focolare.

In the meantime, the bombings and war continued and they took from us the people or things that had been our goals, the ideals of our life: the possibility of continuing our studies – it was my ideal – because the barricades of the war made it impossible; of forming a family – someone else's dream – because her fiancé didn't return from the front; of furnishing the house – the hope of another – because it was damaged, and so forth. The lesson that God was offering to us was clear. Everything passes away, everything is vanity of vanities.

At the same time, the Holy Spirit put a question in my heart for all of us; and with it, the answer: is there an ideal in life that no bomb can destroy, to which we can give ourselves wholeheartedly? Yes, was the answer, there is such an ideal. It is God. God, who in the midst of a war caused by hatred, showed us who he is with unmistakable clarity: God is Love.

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<sup>1</sup>. Virgil, *Ecloghe* X, 69.

We decided to make God the ideal of our lives. This is the first step of our spirituality of communion, the departure point of that spiritual itinerary which must be followed: to choose God as the ideal of our life.

Continuing with our small story, we had found an ideal to live for: God who is Love. But how could we put into practice this new ideal of ours? It was immediately clear to me, to us. We could do so by *being* love as he is, like little shining suns next to the Sun. We asked ourselves how we could be like that.

Every time the air-raid sirens sounded, we ran to a shelter not far from the church of the Capuchin Friars. The only thing we took with us was the little book of the Gospel. We were certain that the Gospel would tell us how we, too, could become love.

We opened it, and because of this new charism, those words, which we were very familiar with, shone out as if a light had been turned on under them. They inflamed our hearts and we felt a great desire to put them into practice at once.

We read: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 19:19). Your neighbor. But who was our neighbor? Our neighbors were all those people around us who were suffering because of the war. People were wounded, in need of clothes and shelter, hungry and thirsty. We began immediately to help them.

Then we read: “Give and gifts will be given to you” (Lk 6:38). We gave and every time, more came back to us. One day, there was only one apple in the house. We gave it to a poor man who asked for something to eat. That same morning, perhaps from a relative, a dozen apples arrived. We gave them away, too, and in the evening someone brought us a suitcase – full of apples! This is what happened all the time!

Another sentence we read was, “Ask and you will receive” (see Mt 21:22). We asked in prayer and we received.

One day – this is one of the first episodes we always tell – a poor man asked me for a pair of shoes, size 12. Knowing that Jesus had identified himself with the poor, I went to the church of St. Clare, which at that time was near the St. Clare hospital, and I asked Jesus: “Give me a pair of shoes, size 12, for you in that poor man.” As I was leaving the church, a young lady, who is probably here today, Duccia Calderari, handed me a package. I opened it, and there was a pair of shoes size 12. (applause)

Countless episodes have taken place like this throughout the years. And they bring the fullness of joy into our hearts. Jesus had made promises and now he was keeping them. So he wasn't a reality of the past, but of the present. The Gospel was true!

Having personally experienced that the Gospel is true made us all the more eager to continue the new way of life we had undertaken. We told others about what was happening, so that in meeting us they didn't feel that it was just an encounter with a few girls, but an encounter with Jesus, alive today.

The air-raid shelter we used offered little protection because there was no door to it. Death could have come at any time. So another pressing question arose in my heart: is there a word of the Gospel that is particularly dear to God's heart? If so, we wanted to live that sentence at least in the final moments of our life.

The Gospel revealed it to us: "This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:12-13). We looked at one another and declared: "I am ready to give my life for you." "And I for you." "And I for you." Each one of us for all the others. It was a solemn pact. It was the foundation upon which the whole Movement would be built.

In the meantime, although we were not asked to die, we lived this pact by sharing everything with one another: the few material and spiritual goods we had, our sufferings, joys, trials. Once we had started to live mutual love, we noticed that our spiritual life took a qualitative leap forward. We were filled with a new certainty, a joy and peace never experienced before, a fullness of life, a greater abundance of light.

Why? The answer became evident at once. Since we were trying to love one another, the words of Jesus were fulfilled among us. He had said: "Where two or three are gathered in my name (that is, "gathered in my love", as the Fathers of the Church say, and that is what we were doing), there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20). He, our invisible Brother, had silently, spiritually joined our group. Now he who is the source of love and of light was there present in our midst. We never wanted to lose him.

(Interval with Music)

We continue now with our story during the war in Trent. One day, seeking shelter from the bombs, we found ourselves in a dark cellar on Via Travai. We had a lighted candle and the Gospel in our hands. We opened it and read: "Father, that they may all be one" (Jn 17:11-21). It is the prayer Jesus said before he died. Always because of the gift we mentioned earlier, we had the impression that we could understand something of those difficult and powerful words. They instilled in our hearts the conviction that we were born for that page of the Gospel, that it was almost like the *magna charta* of our Movement. We were born for unity, that is, to contribute to the unity of people with God and with one another.

In that same prayer, Jesus continued: "May they also be one in us so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). This is what happens around us, united in this way through mutual love: people who no longer believe, regain their faith; others feel strengthened in their faith. More and more people change their lifestyle, people convert to God; they find the strength to follow the vocation they perceive in their hearts, or to remain faithful to the choices they have already made.

After only a few months, about 500 people in Trent, but also in Povo, Partignano and other towns, men and women of all ages and vocations, from the most varied social backgrounds, shared our Ideal and formed, in the midst of the world, a community similar to that of the early Christians.

Meanwhile, the words of the Gospel guided our spiritual journey and appeared to us as unique, fascinating, clear-cut words that we could translate into life; they are universal, light for every person who comes into this world. Consequently, the people of the Movement immersed themselves in the words of the Gospel, they nourished

themselves with them, they re-evangelized themselves. The Christian revolution was kindled around them and spread like wildfire.

One sentence of the Gospel touched us in a special way. “Anyone who listens to you (the Apostles) listens to me” (Lk 10:16). We wanted to put it into practice at once, so we went to see our bishop, Carlo De Ferrari, seeing in him a successor of the Apostles. He listened to us, smiled and said: “The hand of God is here,” and his approval and blessing accompanied us for the rest of his life.

This first approval on the part of the ecclesiastical authority had a twofold effect on us: it reassured us that the light we were following and continue to follow is authentic, it is authentically Christian, and this quickened our pace.

We experienced happiness, discoveries, graces, conquests. And these are certainly one aspect of Gospel life. But right from the start we understood that everything also had another side to it, that the tree had its roots. The Gospel covers you with love, but it also demands everything of you.

“Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies,” we read in John, “it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest” (Jn 12:24). The personification of this is Jesus forsaken, whose fruit was the redemption of humanity.

Jesus crucified! We received a new understanding of him through an episode from those early months of 1944.

Due to a particular circumstance, we learned that Jesus suffered the most on the cross when he experienced the abandonment of the Father: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46). We were deeply touched by this fact. Our youth and enthusiasm, but above all, the grace of God urged us to choose Jesus in his abandonment as the way to accomplish our Ideal of love. From that moment on, we seemed to discover his countenance everywhere.

Because he had personally experienced the separation of us human beings from God and among ourselves, and had felt that the Father was far from him, we recognized him in all our personal sufferings, which were not lacking, and in the sufferings of our neighbors, who were often lonely, abandoned and forgotten like him. We also saw him in all the divisions, traumas, inequalities and reciprocal indifferences, both small or big, within families, between generations, between rich and poor, even, at times, within the Church itself. Later on, we recognized him in the divisions among the various churches, among the different religions and also between those who believe and those who do not have any religious belief. However, all these divisions did not frighten us; on the contrary, because of our love for him forsaken, they attracted us.

He was the One who taught us how to face them, how to live them, how to contribute towards overcoming them, when, feeling abandoned by the Father, he re-abandoned his spirit into the hands of the Father: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46), thus giving humanity the possibility of being reunited within itself and with God, and indicating the way how to do so. He showed himself to us, therefore, as the key to unity.

In the *Novo millennio ineunte* (“At the Beginning of the New Millennium”), the Holy Father says wonderful things about Jesus forsaken, describing his abandonment as the most paradoxical aspect of his passion.

The war ended. The adherents of the Movement were able to move around the country to study, find work, or in order to bring this life to others. In fact, they were invited to many cities and villages to speak about what they had lived and seen. Quite soon, from the north to the south of Italy, Christian communities flourished like the one that had begun here in Trent.

Some of us moved to Rome, but without forgetting our native city. We returned to our mountains every summer for ten years, from 1949 to 1959, with more and more people of the Movement, and we could almost say that we formed a temporary little town there: the Mariapolis. It was during one of these gatherings in Fiera di Primiero that a Chinese bishop, Bishop Vanni, a friend of the Movement, in the presence of our Archbishop Carlo De Ferrari, opened his remarks with the words: “Those who drink the water will think of the source.”

The Movement expanded in a way that has been authoritatively described as “explosive” and soon crossed the border into other European nations. From 1958 on, it began to spread to other continents. Today it is present, as we know, in 182 countries all over the world and numbers millions of people.

And since, “Those who drink the water will think of the source,” our city of Trent, in view of the story I have just narrated, is now known in every part of the world.

But the charism of the Holy Spirit did not only give us a spirituality. It also suggested the structures of this Movement. It is well organized with an International Center and eighteen branches, representing all the vocations, from children to Bishops. It is subdivided into many zones or regions of the world. There are many social action projects, some of substantial size. The Movement also has 27 publishing houses and 35 editions of its magazine in different languages. There are 20 little towns of witness in different parts of the world, as we mentioned in these days. We have secretariats for the various dialogues and centers for what we call the “inundations,” which I will speak about now.

The four dialogues foreseen by Vatican II are very much alive in our Movement. The dialogue among individuals and groups in the Catholic world is extensive and profound, and a deep communion has begun among the various movements and ecclesial communities, as well as other religious orders, as we saw at the cathedral.

In the ecumenical field, there is a profound dialogue with Christians of 350 churches, all members of our Movement, so that our spirituality of unity is considered to be an ecumenical spirituality by the heads of the various churches and others. This spirituality already creates among us who belong to different churches a certain spiritual unity, because of living our spirituality, almost to the point of making us feel that we are one Christian people awaiting full reunification.

The Movement is also in contact with members of the major world religions: Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, etc. This dialogue,



nurtured also by talks about our Christian experience given in temples, mosques and synagogues – as we are invited to do – has dismantled centuries-old prejudices against Christ, against Christians and against the Church. The so-called “seeds of the Word” present in their faiths come into light, while these brothers and sisters adopt truths that are typically Christian.

Furthermore, very many people who do not have any particular religious faith are also involved in the Movement. We work together to safeguard the human values we share: solidarity, ecology, peace, human rights and so on.

But the Movement also brings an invasion of the Gospel in many fields of human endeavor, into politics, the economy, the media, art, science, sociology, education, medicine, and so on. These are what we call “inundations,” referring to something St. John Chrysostom said. He affirmed that the “springs of living water” (cf. Jn 4:14 and 7:38) spoken of in the Gospel, bring about inundations of the Spirit in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the Movement is beginning to offer an answer to the dramatic problems of society by bringing about, for example, a new economic trend, through the Economy of Communion, which can lead people to imitate the life of the early Christians, among whom no one was in need. Or, in the political field, the Movement for Unity in Politics is renewing the way of doing politics, with the goal of reaching the great ideal of a more united world.

My dear fellow citizens and friends, this, very briefly, is the story, in particular, of the early years of our Movement which, in the vast panorama of all humanity, is one of the charismatic realities in which John Paul II sees the budding of a new springtime in the Church. John Paul II, everyone’s Pope, is also, in a special way, our Pope! We are always moved when we remember his visit on April 30, 1995, to this city that hosted the Council of Trent. On that occasion, in Piazza Fiera, the Pope expressed a wish. He had been periodically informed of our decades-long ecumenical work to strengthen the bonds of unity between our Church and the Churches of the Reform. Therefore, on that occasion, he said that he hoped a study could one day be done, that would cover the period from the Council of Trent, which sanctioned the division among the churches, to the irruption of the charism of unity which, through the Focolare Movement that began in this city, is reaching the entire Church.

Let us thank the Holy Spirit, the main author of this Work, which is truly a Work of God. I have spoken about it today, because in the Scriptures it states: “May they see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Applause)

Let us thank Mary, who has had so much to do with us, both in the past and now.

I thank Archbishop Bressan and Mayor Pacher for their presence here today.

I thank all of you for your attention.

After a brief interval, some members of our Movement from different parts of the world will offer their testimonies.

(Musical interlude and experiences)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Chrysostom, *Johannem homila*, 51:PG 59,284.

Chiara: I can't leave without thanking you again. It has been a wonderful afternoon! You moved us, you enthused us, you strengthened us. Long live Trent! And long live everyone who is here! (Applause) Of course, I will not list all those who had a part in this afternoon program because it would make it very long and very late. I only thank the Bishop who had to leave for Rome, for the beatification of two persons, who perhaps come from Trent. He had to leave, but he was very happy with the day.

I also thank the mayor again for being here with us. (Applause)

And I thank all of you, every one of you. I felt that underlying everything there is the desire that perhaps I can come back to Trent another time, no? (Applause) So let's make a pact, all right? Let's make a pact, since we are people who often make pacts! Let's make a pact to start setting Trent on fire, and then I will come back! (Applause)