

(English translation)

Turin (Royal Theatre), 2 June 2002

Characteristics of the Politician of Unity

It is not my experience but a theme that I was asked to address. The title is this: “The Movement for Unity – which would be the political expression of the Focolare Movement – and political fraternity.

Dear Mr. Mayor, Your Eminence, Honourable senators and deputies, civil and religious leaders who have come from all over the Piedmont and Valle d’Aosta regions, ladies and gentlemen, young people here present, it’s with great joy that I accept this invitation to speak of fraternity in the light of the experience and charter of the Movement for Unity. Yes, it’s with joy and passion, - and it cannot be otherwise – if I think that fraternity, for those who are believers as I am, is indeed the plan of God on the whole of humanity called to be one sole family. In fact, the Gospel message emphasizes the concept of fraternity in a very special way, elevating it to a divine height, because of our participation as human beings in the very life of the Most Holy Trinity where the Triune God, who is One, is the perfect and supreme model of fraternity.

However, since the practice of love towards ones neighbour is present in the sacred books of many mainstream world religions and is also inscribed in the heart of every person even if they are without any religious affiliation, then it is possible for all people – even with all our diversity of cultures and beliefs – to love and be loved and in this way giving life to fraternity. Fraternity is everyone’s calling and therefore does not exempt politicians. They too, as everyone else, are called to put it into practice, to feel that they are brothers and sisters to one another. It’s their first duty, even before dedicating themselves to their own party, before their decision-making which distinguishes their different opinions. Before all of this.

This is something good because love, if it always sheds light, does so also on the decisions that have to be taken, so as to make the goal of politics – the common good – more actual and attainable.

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For politicians of unity, the choice to be politically committed is first of all an act of love. With this they respond to an authentic vocation, to a personal call. They respond to a social need, to a problem in their city or the suffering of their people and the needs of their time. Those who are believers sense that it is God calling them through the different circumstances. The non-believers respond to a human question that resonates within their conscience: but both imbue their actions with love and both find their home in the Movement for Unity.

In second place, the politicians for unity are aware that, if politics is love right from its roots, even the political adversaries may have made their own decisions out of love. This requires mutual respect, understanding the essence of their commitment, going beyond their ways which are often marked with animosity with which their agendas are lived and that can always be corrected.

The politicians for unity have at heart that also their adversaries may fulfil the good plan they are proposing because, if they respond to a call, to a real need, which is an integral part of that common good that can only be constructed together.

The politicians for unity therefore love not only those who vote for them, but also their adversaries; not only their own party, but also the other’s party; not only their own country, but all of humanity. And loving everyone makes them understand and live the universal dimension of politics.

Furthermore, the politicians of unity cannot remain passive in the face of conflicts, often harsh ones, which create divides between politicians and citizens. On the contrary, they must be the ones to take the first step, even just with a simple greeting, in order to reach out to the others, re-establishing broken lines of communication. Creating personal relationships where they don’t exist, or where they have been damaged, may at times mean being able to unblock a political stalemate.

Taking the initiative in loving, for the politicians for unity, is an act that honours the dignity of the human being, but also transforms into a real political activity; it helps to overcome prejudices and roles, which very often paralyze politicians in useless oppositional stances.

Another aspect of fraternity in politics is the capacity to set oneself aside so as to make space for the other person, to remain silent so as to listen and hear one's opponents. It's a "losing oneself" which every day renews the initial political commitment, through which we decided to be concerned about the others' well-being and not about ourselves. In this way we "make ourselves one" with them, we open ourselves up to the reality that they live. Making ourselves one helps to see beyond one's own agenda, makes us understand aspects of the others, of life, of reality, that also open up a wider political horizon: the politicians who learn to make themselves one with everyone are able to better understand and make proposals. The art of "making ourselves one" is a true political realism.

Finally, fraternity finds its full expression in reciprocal love. Democracy, if understood correctly, has a great need of it: love among politicians, and among politicians and citizens.

The politicians for unity are not satisfied with loving on their own, but they also try to bring others, whether colleagues or opponents, to love. This is because politics is relationship, a common project, not only based on individual decisions. It is a reciprocal love that politics requires not only in personal relationships, but as an institutional need. The different tasks that a democracy assigns, in their deepest meaning, have the end goal of fostering reciprocal love: if the government's action of love is expressed in the decision or proposal, the response of love from the opposition is accomplished through their counter-proposal and political power. However, all these aspects of political love, that bring about fraternity, also require sacrifice. So many times political activity is accompanied by solitude, a sense of abandonment, misunderstanding also on behalf of those who are closest to us. Who, among those in politics, has never felt hurt, isolated or betrayed, to the point of feeling tempted to throw in the towel?

Well, Jesus also lived all of this and when he reached the apex of his passion, he cried out the fathomless distance that he experienced from the One who had been closest to him throughout his whole life: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" With this cry Jesus lowered himself to the depths of our human condition, he reached down to us men and women to the point of our failures and detachment from God. We were all detached from the Father and divided amongst us: it was necessary for the Son to become like us, to gather us together and bring us back to the Father, to transform us into brothers and sisters. It was necessary that He no longer feel himself as Son, so that we could become children of God. But, turning again to God he said: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," and Jesus went beyond the abyss and recomposed unity with God and among us.

The forsaken and risen Jesus is the model of every human being and he is especially the model for politicians, precisely because politicians are the ones who embrace all divisions, separations, the wounds of their own people, so as to find solutions, to recompose unity among them. This is the price of fraternity that is required of politicians: a very high price, as is high their vocation. But the reward is also great. In fact, Jesus is human, the complete and perfect human being; and politicians who live the ideal of fraternity thoroughly can also become so. Their tested faithfulness will make them a model, a reference point for all their fellow citizens, the pride of their people.

These are the politicians that the Movement for Unity wants to generate, nourish and sustain. It's not a utopia, as some people who have already gone to Heaven tell us through their lives: people like Joseph Lux, former vice-prime minister of the Czech Republic, who was able to conquer the admiration of both his colleagues and opponents; or Domenico Mangano, who lived his political career in the city council of Viterbo, Italy, in constant service to his fellow citizens; or Iginio Giordani, whose recently initiated process of canonization is shedding light on how he not only lived theological virtues, but also the civil ones: this is a sign that we can become saints not "despite politics", but "through politics".

Today, fraternity is ever more needed on our planet. Terrorism has surfaced with all its virulence. But we know that there are more than one causes for this: it is enough to think of the inequality that exists between poor and rich countries of the world, which generates hatred and unleashes terrible vendettas. Therefore we need – and our times are crying out for it – a more just distribution of goods. But material goods don't move on their own but are mobilized by hearts. This is why it is urgent that the ideal of fraternity become rooted in all peoples especially among politicians, also of different countries.

Is this a dream? For those who believe only in their own strength and resources, yes; but for those who believe in He who guides history, no dream is impossible. This is what the Movement for Unity aspires to, perhaps like a tiny David in front of Goliath, but together with all those who are also committed in doing their own part to see this fulfilled.

Thank you all for your attention.

(from Chiara Lubich's talk when she was conferred the honorary citizenship of Turin)