

**ADDRESS BY CHIARA LUBICH
TO THE 19th NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS**

Pescara, 15 September 1977

Reverend Cardinals,
Reverend Bishops,
Congress members,
and people of Pescara,

Today is a feast day of Mary, the day in which we remember her in her immense sufferings. It is under her protection that the city of Pescara lives.

The Congress has dedicated this day to "woman" - "woman" as viewed in the light of Mary.

This evening it is a woman who speaks to you.

I have been invited to offer you my witness of life and faith, which goes hand in hand with the founding and the development of the Focolare Movement.

It is perhaps a rather unusual experience.

Yes, because a pen does not know what it is going to write.

An artist's brush does not know what it is going to paint.

A sculpture's chisel does not know what it is going to carve.

In the same way, when God takes a human creature into His hands in order to begin some work of God in the Church, that person does not know what he will have to do. He or she is an instrument.

And I think perhaps it is the same in my case.

The Movement, which came to life in Trent, has all the qualities which characterize a work of God: unconditional unity with the hierarchy of the Church; a fruitfulness and diffusion which is out of proportion with any human effort or genius; crosses, crosses, and more crosses; but also fruits, fruits, the most abundant fruits.

And generally all God's instruments are characterized by this quality: littleness, weakness. St. Paul says that "God chose what is weak in the world ... God chose... things that are not ... so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor 1: 27-29).

And as an instrument moves in the hands of God, He forms it with thousands and thousands of painful and joyous devices. In this way He makes it more and more suited to the task it must carry out, until finally, once it has acquired a deep self knowledge along with a certain insight of God, it is qualified to say: I am nothing, God is everything.

When it all began I had no program, and I knew nothing. The idea of this Work was in God, the blueprint was in heaven. This was true at the beginning. And this has also been true during the 34 years of the Movement's growth.

An early sign. It was 1939. I had been invited to Loreto for a convention of Catholic women students.

Loreto was the starting point of my spiritual experience.

I followed the course there along with all the others. But whenever I could, during the breaks, I ran to the shrine of the little house of Nazareth.

I didn't have time to ascertain whether, historically speaking, this was really the home which housed the Holy Family. I knelt down beside that wall blackened by the smoke of the lanterns. I was not able to utter a single word. There was something new and divine which enveloped me, almost crushed me.

In my mind I contemplated the virginal life of those three.

So then, Mary had lived here. Joseph might have crossed the room from here to there. Baby Jesus in their midst must have known this place for years. The walls resounded with his voice....

Each idea weighed down on me, gripped at my heart, and I could not keep back the tears that fell. This was the first time.

But then, each time there was a break in the course, I hurried back there. Those virgins living together with Jesus among them had an irresistible appeal. And each time I felt that same sensation of something divine which almost crushed me, and the tears.

It was the last day. The church was crowded with young people. A thought comes to my mind, very clearly, a thought which I will never forget: you will be followed by a multitude of virgins.

Back in the region near Trent I met the children I had been teaching and the parish priest. The latter, seeing me so happy, asked: "Have you found your way?" "Yes," I replied. "Marriage?" "No." "A convent?" "No." "Will you stay as a virgin in the world?" "No. It is a fourth way," I concluded. But that was all I knew.

Four years passed by.

As I was helping someone out of love, I realized that God was calling me to give myself to Him forever. I asked the permission of a priest. He agreed. It was December 7th, 1943. I had an inner joy that was inexplicable and secret, and yet contagious.

For various reasons I became acquainted with other young people of about the same age. They wanted to follow my way.

May 13th, 1944. A large-scale bombing.

The war was also raging in Trent. Ruins, debris, death.

One day I found myself with my new companions in a dark cellar, with a lighted candle and the Gospel in my hands. I opened it. There was Jesus' prayer before His death: "Father... that all may be one" (Jn 17:11). It was not an easy passage for young girls like us, but one by one those words seemed to come to light, and they filled our hearts with the conviction that it was for that very page of the Gospel that we had been born.

On the feast of Christ the King we all met around an altar. We tell Jesus: "You know how unity can be accomplished. Here we are. If you want, you can use us."

The liturgy that day fascinated us. "Ask of me," it said, "and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (Ps 2:8).

We did ask. God is almighty.

The air-raids continued, and along with them those things or persons which had been in a certain sense the ideal of our young hearts were destroyed. One loved her home - it was damaged by the bombs. Another was waiting to get married - her fiancée never came back from the front. My ideal was my studies at the university - the war prevented it.

Each event touched us deeply. The lesson God was offering through all these things is clear: "Everything is vanity of vanities. Everything passes."

At the same time God put a question into my heart, for all of us, and with it the answer. "Is there an ideal which never dies, which no bombs can destroy, to which we can give ourselves completely?"

Yes, it is God.

We decide to make God the ideal of our lives.

Our parents took refuge in the valleys. We stayed on in Trent. Some stayed on account of their job or their studies, I stayed to care for the Movement which was just coming to life. We lived in an apartment made up of only a few rooms; we called it the "*casetta*" - the "little house."

Day and night we ran to the air-raid shelters. We brought the Gospel there with us.

We had found the ideal for which to live - God.

But how can we put this into practice?

The Gospel answers: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21). And so no false piety or sentimentalism. Doing the will of God - this is what matters.

The shelter we flee to was not safe. Death was always at our door. And so another question pressed upon us: "Is there a will of God that is especially pleasing to Him? If we should die, we want to have put that into practice, at least in our final moments."

The Gospel gave us the answer and spoke of a new commandment which Jesus called His own: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:12-13). We looked at one another.

We declared: "I am ready to die for you, I for you, I for you, all for each one." This solemn promise opened our hearts to the thousands of daily demands of brotherly love. We weren't always asked to die for one another. In the meantime we could share all we had: our worries, our joys, our sufferings, our poor material possessions, our tiny spiritual riches...

We noticed that our life had taken a leap in quality. Someone had silently entered our group, an invisible brother, who gave us certainty, joy such as we had never experienced before, a new peace, fullness of life, unmistakable light. It was Jesus, carrying out among us those words of His: "Where two or

three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). We didn't ever want to lose Him.

Later, much later, we come to understand that this was a reproduction - in embryo and in a very original way - of the little house of Nazareth: virgins living together with Jesus in their midst - the focolare.

But in order to have Him with us, we must always be ready to love to the point of giving our lives for one another.

Jesus is spiritually and fully present among us if we are united in this way.

He had said: "That they may be one in us, so that the world may believe..." (Jn 17:21). Christ is present in the unity of brothers and the world believes, the world is converted. This is what happened around us. There were many conversions of the most varied types, vocations that had been in danger were saved, and new vocations were born.

In a few months, there were nearly 500 people, men and women, of every age, vocation and social background who wanted to share our ideal.

Everything was put in common among us as in the early Christian community.

I had long before put my beloved books up in the attic. Naively, like many others, I had been searching for truth in philosophy. But when I came to understand that Jesus is the Truth incarnate, I left my studies and followed Him.

His words in the Gospel are unique, fascinating, clear-cut; they can be put into life, they are light for every person who comes into this world, and therefore universal. When you live them, everything changes: your relationship with God, with your neighbors, with your enemies. Those words put all values into their rightful place, and they make you put every-thing else to one side, even father, mother, brothers/sisters, your job,,, in order to put God in the first place in your heart. And for this reason they contain extraordinary promises: the hundredfold in this life, and eternal life.

It is a Gospel which we had not known before. Where is that kind of exaggerated piety, the monotonous chanting of empty prayers, faith that is just habit, the unapproachable God? No, no, this is not Jesus religion. He is God and acts as such. For the little bit that you give, He overwhelms you with gifts. You are alone, and you find yourself surrounded by a thousand mothers, a thousand fathers, a thousand brothers and sisters, and all sorts of material goods which you hand out to those who are in need.

There is no circumstance in the life of man which cannot find an explicit or implicit answer in that little book which contains the words of God.

The people of our Movement immerse themselves in the Gospel, nourish themselves on it, re-evangelize their lives, and they are moved and filled with joy to experience that everything that Jesus says and promises comes true. "Give and you will receive" (Lk 6:38). It is a daily experience. They give and give and give, and they receive and receive and receive.

"Ask and it will be given to you" (Mt 7:7). They asked all kinds of things for the various needs. And in the midst of the war arrived sacks and sacks of flour, cans of milk and jam, firewood, and clothing for all the poor of the city.

The new and elating Gospel-based experiences were passed on from one to the next. They were a small-scale echo of those words of the apostles: Christ is risen! They say: Christ is alive!

We were particularly touched by a phrase of the Gospel: "Anyone who listens to you, listens to me" (Lk 10:16). Anyone who listens to the Bishop, listens to Christ. In order to put this into practice we presented ourselves to our Bishop. We explained what was happening. We were ready to destroy it all, at his sole desire. In the Bishop it is God who is speaking. And God is what matters.. Msgr. Carlo de Ferrari listened, smiled, and said: "Here there is the hand of God," and his approval and blessing accompanied us until his death.

The war ended. Those who were part of the Movement were free to move again for their studies, their jobs, or for the demands of giving witness. In fact, they were called to many cities and towns to talk about what they had lived and seen.

In the meantime, beside the women's focolares which had grown in number, the men's focolares were born. Moreover - and this is a great novelty - the focolare opened its arms to take in, inasmuch as they can, married people eager to give themselves in a total way.

From the north to the south of Italy there was a silent flourishing of Christian communities similar to that which had begun in Trent.

The Church of Rome, with centuries of experience and wisdom, studied the new Movement with paternal love.

Joy, discoveries, graces and conquests. Certainly this is the Gospel. But since the beginning we understood that everything has two sides, that a tree has its root.

The Gospel covers you with love, but demands everything.

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23). Therefore suffering.

"Unless the grain of wheat which has fallen to the ground dies," continues Jesus, "it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). Therefore death.

"Every branch of mine that bears no fruit," Jesus goes on, "(the Father) takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes that it may bear more fruit" (Jn. 15:2). More suffering.

And this Movement has experienced suffering in a thousand ways, as a consequence of living the Gospel, as something providential, necessary for the purification of its members. But with the grace of God each person has been able to love the suffering, taking for his own the words of St. Paul: "I know nothing ... except Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

The Movement developed according to a precise plan of God always unknown to us, but which is disclosed from time to time. The various vocations began to take shape, each of which is in its own way totalitarian. They are the true moving force behind the entire Movement.

Beside the focolarini - that multitude of virgins which recalls Loreto – there were men, women and priests. In 1956 the volunteers came to life. The Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, told them: "You represent a living, profound, and uplifting reality - the reality of souls who, in every nation, condition, and social field, dedicate themselves to Christ and to humanity, taking fullest advantage of their talents."

With a diffusion which authoritative sources have defined as an explosion, the Movement, in its first 14 years, crossed the boundaries of all the European nations. From 1958 on it reached all the other continents, and it is now present in more than 163 nations of the world.

In the meantime, with Pope John, the first approval arrived from Rome. And with Pope Paul VI came the first audiences, and further approval, because the Movement had branched out in new ways.

The Holy Father seemed to take advantage of every opportunity, especially in his public audiences, to present to the Catholic world, along with other works, this new child of the Church - the Focolare Movement.

In 1967 a small group of young Germans who live this spirit were at an audience with the Holy Father. The Pope encouraged them, saying, "Go ahead." This was the spark. All over the world flourished the Second Generation of the Focolare Movement - the Gen.

In a society poisoned by violence, a violence often set off by young people, by thefts which are the work of young people, and by the alienating experiences of young people, the Gen are a sign of contradiction. They love purity and go against the current, at times alone against all the rest. In a world, which indifference and atheism have rendered dull and meaningless, they cry out God with their lives, with their projects, and with the modern means of communication, and tens of thousands of other young people all over the world find what they have always been searching for.

The Gen work as one solid block, along with the focolarini, inventing thousands of ways and means, to build a little town in the Cameroon for the Bangwa tribe which is dying out there. It is Fontem, where already thousands and thousands of Animists have converted to Christianity because of the witness of mutual love between blacks and whites. People of the surrounding nations flock to Fontem to see "what the world could be like if everyone lived the Gospel."

Six other little towns like Fontem have grown up in Brazil, in Argentina, in Germany, and in Italy, at Loppiano, near Florence, and at in Switzerland, at Montet.

In 1971 all over the world a movement for boys and girls is born - the Gen 3. At times they can truly teach adults, as living witnesses of these words: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the

kingdom of heaven." With a love that is moving, they are helping children younger than themselves to live the Gospel.

Around the married focolarini, the New Families Movement took form. In it "the family" flourishes anew and as splendid as it is in the plan of God.

Around the volunteers the New Humanity Movement developed, bringing God into the world of education, the world of medicine, into the arts, sciences, factories, and every expression of human life.

Around the diocesan priests the Priests' Movement was born. Around young men called to the priesthood, the New Generation of Priests, joyous and solid. Parish priests help to develop the New Parish Movement.

Throughout these years the spirit of the Movement has also penetrated religious communities of men and women. The fruits are: renewal of the community, rediscovery of the founder's charism, and rediscovery of the value of their rules.

Nineteen sixty was an important year. We did not know it. God did. It signaled the beginning of the penetration of the spirit of the Movement among Christian brothers/sisters who are non-Catholics.

It was evident that it was God at work here, too, because a short time before, when a well-known personality had questioned me about the goal of the Movement, I replied that it was by no means ecumenical.

But God was waiting to take me by surprise.

I was in Germany addressing a group of nuns. Three Lutheran pastors who were present were surprised at the fact that Catholics were living the Gospel. Mutual incomprehension was so strong that they thought the Gospel an exclusive possession of the Church of the Reform. In any case, they were astonished not only because the Gospel was spoken about, but because there was something more - we wanted to live the Gospel.

Right away, they invited us to bring our experience among the Lutherans.

Groups of Lutherans came to Rome almost every year. Above all they wanted to see the Pope with their own eyes and to deepen the new life which the Movement proposed. They felt they could share in it with us, at least in part.

A fraternity was born between them and us, fraternity which is sincere and open because it is based on love and on the truth, which we never hide. This is why they have esteem for the Movement. Centuries-old prejudices fell away.

Besides the Lutherans, in Germany we are in contact with Baptists, with members of the Free Churches, and with others ... Their Christian commitment takes on new life. The Movement grew in this aspect. And so the idea was born to build up a Centre of communal life for Catholics and Lutherans at Ottmaring, in Bavaria. The permission of the Catholic Bishop, Msgr. Stimpfle, was very encouraging, as was that of the Lutheran Bishop, Dr. Dietzfelbinger. The latter, in an audience, told me: "I see the churches like many people sitting in a

semicircle each at a distance from one another. Now they are beginning to extend their hands. One of these hands is your Movement."

Cardinal Bea, in his unforgettable opening speech, reminded us that the more deeply Christians of every denomination live the Gospel, the closer they come to one another, because it is in this way that they become more similar to Christ.

A few Anglican ministers by chance found themselves present at an ecumenical meeting between Catholics and Lutherans. They were touched by the characteristic atmosphere of warmth, where long separated Christians recognized that they are brothers/sisters through Baptism. They didn't want to get left behind. They prepared an audience for me in London, July 1st, 1966, with the then Primate of the Anglican Communion, Dr. Ramsey. He told me: "I see the hand of God in this Work" and he encouraged me to spread the Movement within the Church of England.

His successor, too, Archbishop Coggan, in an audience on April 11, 1977, at Canterbury, expressed the wish for an even vaster diffusion. Four consecrated Anglican focolarini were introduced to him. He was happy to know that the same vocations, so numerous and flourishing in the Catholic Church, are now beginning to open within the other Churches.

Today the Focolare Movement is living and growing among Anglicans, Presbyterians and Baptists from the north to the south of England.

There are many members also in the Reformed Churches of Switzerland and Holland.

In Australia and in North and South America our life has entered into many different denominations.

June 13th, 1967. Patriarch Athenagoras had heard something about us. He wants to know more. He is expecting me. Athenagoras is a monument of love, wisdom and far-sightedness. He is one of the greatest personalities of this century, and yet he wants to be - as he always says - a simple focolarino. He wants to get to know the Movement thoroughly. He loves it in a way that is beyond description. For this reason, in the years that followed, I went often to Istanbul. It was also my hope to relieve the anxiety which tormented him due to the imperfect unity with Rome. Once, in speaking to me about the Holy Father, he confided: "It is incredible how I feel united to the Pope. It is a mystery for my very self!" He was ready, but the overall situation was not ripe. He lived foreseeing what is to come: "A splendid dawn of a new Christian springtime, so awaited for centuries! Onward, beloved sons and daughters of the one Church of Christ; this day must come, and will come!"

His successor, Patriarch Dimitrios, whom we know, continues in the same line.

The Focolare Movement has come to life and is growing also among the Orthodox in the Orient

Besides this, the diffusion of the Movement in all the world has brought us in direct contact with members of other great religions.

In the past few years, especially in Asia, from Korea to Hong Kong, from Japan to Macau, and in North America and in the Middle East, there is a

dialogue with Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and others which is full of promise.

Very many non-believers in contact with the Movement have found new faith.

This is my witness of faith and life, in connection with the Focolare Movement.

Someone might ask: "What is the reason for this extraordinary expansion of the Movement in the world among hundreds of thousands of people?" No human force can explain it.

Well then, God uses many and varied graces to give birth to a Work of His and to make it grow. But among all of these, I feel I could emphasize two.

Remember the beginning of our experience. The first focolarine in a cellar by the light of a candle comprehended that it was for one page of the Gospel that they were born.

In this page, Jesus asks the Father that all Christians be one with Him, as He is one with the Father. And, if all are one with Jesus, each is also one with the others. It is the re-request that Jesus made before dying, for an extremely high unity among His followers - the highest unity possible.

Jesus asks for this. But shortly before asking He created the conditions for accomplishing this unity.

On that Holy Thursday, pregnant with mystery, with His divine creativity, He had invented this extraordinary means for accomplishing unity - the Eucharist. In fact, an exceptional phenomenon takes place in believers who receive communion fulfilling the required conditions - they become one with Christ. The Council says it: they are transformed into that which they receive (see L.G. 26). A believer is transformed into the Christ whom he receives.

"Father," Jesus had said, "love them as you loved me."

And for those who want it, this takes place, they become other Christs, and there are unforeseeable consequences for the good of all humankind.

Now we cannot speak of the Focolare Movement without speaking of the Eucharist. Since the beginning all its members have received daily communion, and when someone becomes acquainted with the Movement he/she senses - certainly moved by the Spirit - that he/she too must nourish him/herself with Jesus each day.

Who was it then that brought about the worldwide expansion of the Movement? Christ present in its members through the Eucharist.

Then another secret - Mary, who has always been considered as our leader, mother, teacher and guide.

This is the Work of God, certainly. But to create it, God, in a particular way, used Mary. And we know that wherever Mary is at work, even the desert blooms.

But is God's design for this Movement at its end?

Must we only consolidate the present positions, or will something new be born?

Experience tells me that we will see new things.

Praise, glory and worship to Jesus in the Eucharist, alive among us,
bond of unity.

Love, fidelity, and gratitude to Mary, mother of the Movement, mother of
the Church.