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Answers to Questions

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**Editors' Introduction:**

During a visit to the UK in 2004, Chiara Lubich (1920-2008), foundress of the Focolare Movement, gave a talk at St. Mary's University College in Twickenham.\* In her presentation, she particularly associates the Balthasarian notion of the Marian profile of the Catholic Church with the charismatic role of the Focolare Movement, and above all with how all Christians can *live* this reality by following the example of Mary.

The following translation (from Italian) of her speech is introduced by Professor Brian K. Reynolds, who also kindly contacted the Chiara Lubich Centre in Rome and obtained permission to publish the material in this journal.

\*The college was awarded full university title by the Privy Council and became St. Mary's University, Twickenham, in 2014. It is now the home of the Centre for Marian Studies.

**Chiara Lubich**

**‘Ecclesial Movements and the Marian Profile of the Church’  
with Answers to Questions  
St. Mary’s College, London, June 16, 2004**

**Introduction by Brian K. Reynolds**

**Introduction**

Chiara Lubich (1920-2008), foundress of the Focolare Movement (officially recognised by the Catholic Church as the Work of Mary), whose Gospel-inspired spirituality centres on Jesus’ prayer for unity (Jn 17:21), was one of the most significant religious figures of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> When she consecrated her life to God on December 7, 1943, the vigil of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, she had little idea that the charism she had received would give life to a worldwide Movement, claiming more than two million adherents, whose members include not only Catholics, but Christians of different Churches and ecclesial communities, members of the major world religions and people with non-religious convictions, united in a common commitment to promoting human fraternity.

Chiara grew up in Trent, amidst the traditional religiosity of provincial Italy, and took an active part in the Franciscan Tertiaries as well as Catholic Action where the Virgin was above all an object of piety and devotion. Yet from the outset her perception of Mary went beyond mere religiosity, being marked by a strong emphasis on the Virgin’s exemplarity, a relatively unusual focus in those days. For Lubich, Mary’s whole life, from the Annunciation to her desolation under the Cross and beyond was a constant yes to God. Far from offering a distant, unattainable ideal, she is the great leveller since all people, no matter their rank or status can and should imitate her in opening themselves up to God so as to discover his unique plan of love for each one of them. Long before the post-conciliar emphasis on Mary as first disciple, Lubich saw her as ‘clothed in the Word’, and therefore a living Gospel, an emphasis that has resonated strongly with those who belong to the Protestant traditions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The most comprehensive biography on Lubich in English is Maurizio Gentilini, *Chiara Lubich: A Prophet of Unity*, New York: New City Press, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Although Lubich wrote and spoke extensively on Mary, and had many insights of great significance, especially during a period of mystical illumination that lasted from the summer of 1949 to 1951, her Marian thought is not well known and has not received the sort of attention it merits from Mariologists. For an overview of her Marian

As already noted, the officially approved name of the Focolare Movement is the Work of Mary, while both its summer gatherings and its many centres around the world are called 'cities of Mary' (Mariapolis). This reflects a central tenet of the charism of unity, which embraces but goes beyond individual spirituality, by emphasising a 'collective sanctity' and 'spirituality of communion', where the route to holiness lies especially in love of one's fellows.<sup>3</sup> Where this love is mutual Christ is generated among those who live according to his New Commandment. Thus, alongside the traditional notion of imitating Mary by generating Jesus spiritually in oneself, Lubich speaks of generating 'Jesus in the midst' (Mt. 18.20). It is this presence of the risen Jesus in the midst of the community which allows the individual members to travel together in a shared journey of sanctification. This, then, is the 'Work of Mary', to generate Christ in the world.

Related to this is a second key element of the spirituality, Jesus Forsaken. Already in 1944, Lubich had begun to intuit how Jesus' cry on the Cross, 'My God, my God, why have you Forsaken me' (Mt. 27.46 and Mk 15.34), was the moment of his maximum suffering, and therefore also of his greatest love.<sup>4</sup> Later, in her period of mystical illumination she would write extensively of the dynamic of not-being/being, that Jesus experienced in the abandonment, where the apparent loss of his relationship with his Father, and therefore, in a certain sense, of his own being, is in reality a fullness, because it is a nothingness of love, offering a glimpse of the dynamics of love in the Trinity.<sup>5</sup> Closely allied to this novel understanding of the Abandonment is the figure of Mary Desolate. In Lubich's understanding, Mary's entrustment to the Apostle John (Jn 19:26) marks the moment of her 'second yes' when she 'loses God for God', by which she means she assents to the loss of her exclusive divine motherhood of Jesus in order to become the mother of Jesus in John.<sup>6</sup>

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writings in English, see Chiara Lubich, *Mary: Flower of Humanity*, edited by Brendan Leady and Judy Povilus, New York: New City Press, 2017. See also her *Mary: The Transparency of God*, New York: New City Press, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> See Chiara Lubich, *A New Way: The Spirituality of Unity*, New City Press, 2006; Chiara Lubich, *Called to be Community: A Guide to Living a Spirituality of Communion*, compiled by Tom Ess, Terry Gunn, Emilie Christy, and Clare Zanzucchi, New York: New City Press, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> See Chiara Lubich, *The Cry of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken: Finding Light in the Face of Darkness*, New York: New City Press, 2001, and Chiara Lubich, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken*, New York: New City Press, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> See Stefan Tobler, *Jesu Gottverlassenheit als Heilsereignis in der Spiritualität Chiara Lubichs: Ein Beitrag zur Überwindung der Sprachnot in der Soteriologie*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> See Máire O'Byrne, *Model of Incarnate Love: Mary Desolate in the Experience and Thought of Chiara Lubich*, London: New City Press, 2011.

Once again, we see here how Lubich conceives of love as a nothingness that is at the same time, plenitude, indeed the greatest possible fulfilment of one's selfhood, since it corresponds to who one truly is in the mind of God. This, then, is the greatness of Mary, that she was the one who was always radically open to God's plan for herself and for humanity. For Lubich, then, Mary offers the most complete and radical example of what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus.

A further aspect of Chiara's understanding of the Jesus Forsaken/Mary Desolate relationship is the birth of the Church through the action of the Holy Spirit, again a notion long present in the tradition, but which Lubich sees within the dynamic of losing God for God. In her understanding, and this is particularly relevant to the last answer she gives at St. Mary's, since Jesus had entrusted his mother to John, meaning that she lost her exclusive divine motherhood, she was excluded from any active role in his redemptive sacrifice on the Cross. Yet Mary's assent to that loss, and her willingness to become the mother of John, and therefore of the mystical Christ present in the Church and humanity as a whole, meant that she was uniquely open to the full graces that were unleashed by the Redemption, so that she is filled in a new way with the Holy Spirit and is therefore able to preside over the Apostles in the Upper Room at Pentecost. In her, therefore is to be found in synthesis, humanity redeemed. This is why she can be mother to all, because she points the way towards what it is to be a member of the human family, 'other Marys', who live between Christ within and Christ among themselves as they journey towards the one Father.<sup>7</sup>

Lubich's talk at St. Mary's must be understood within the context of a commitment she gave publicly to Pope St. John Paul II on the Feast of Pentecost 1998, during the Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, on the theme of 'Ecclesial Movements: Communion and Mission on the Threshold of the Third Millennium'. In his address to the representatives of the more than fifty ecclesial movements, the Pope had underlined the

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<sup>7</sup> For Lubich's illuminations on Mary see Brian K. Reynolds, 'The Virgin Mary: Creation, Incarnation and Redemption: From the Church Fathers to Chiara Lubich', in Donald W. Mitchell (ed.), *Paradise: Reflections on Chiara Lubich's Mystical Journey*, New York: New City Press, 2020, 214-238. This volume is fundamental for anyone who wishes to further explore the mystical thought of Lubich.

importance of the co-essential relationship between the institutional and charismatic aspects of the Church, and had concluded by inviting those present, to turn their 'gaze to Mary, Christ's first disciple, Spouse of the Holy Spirit and Mother of the Church, who was with the Apostles at the first Pentecost, so that she will help us to learn from her *fiat* docility to the voice of the Spirit'.<sup>8</sup> Lubich, in her own address, noted the coincidence between the statutes of the Focolare, which describe how the Movement 'wishes to be a presence of Mary on the earth, almost a continuation of her', and the 'Marian principle' dear to the Pope.<sup>9</sup> She ended, in unscripted remarks, by committing herself and the Movement to building unity among the different ecclesial realities represented that day, something which the Focolare continues to promote to this day.<sup>10</sup> These same emphases are apparent in the St. Mary's talk, where she associates the Balthasarian notion of the Marian profile with the charismatic role of the Movement, and above all with how Christians of all stripes can *live* this reality by following the example of Mary.

### **Welcome and Presentation of Chiara Lubich by Father Michael Hayes<sup>11</sup>**

For the past two years, through a series of lectures, we have been reflecting on the notion of what we mean by 'mission and evangelisation'. We began by studying Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* ['Mission of the Redeemer'], in particular the section in which he said: 'I sense the moment has come to commit all the Church's energy to a new evangelisation and the mission *Ad gentes* [Second Vatican Council's 'Decree on Missionary Activity]'. We had various Cardinals as speakers and their papers have been published in the book, *Missione ed evangelizzazione nel pensiero di alcuni cardinali* ['Mission and Evangelisation in the thought of several Cardinals']. [...] One of the most important points that emerged out of the conversation with those cardinals was to ask where are the charisms of the Spirit in the Church? Where are they emerging? And one area is in the development of new ecclesial movements. Therefore, since October we have been reflecting with some of

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19980530\\_riflessioni.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980530_riflessioni.html), accessed 28 June 2022.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.focolare.org/en/news/1998/05/30/intervento-di-chiara-lubich-all39incontro-del-santo-padre-con-i-movimenti-ecclesiali/>, accessed 28 June 2022.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.focolare.org/en/news/2018/04/17/ecclesial-movements-incarnate-the-gospel/>, accessed 28 June 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Father Michael Hayes was Head of the School of Theology, Philosophy and History at St. Mary's College.

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these movements on their vision of mission and evangelisation. We felt it was a great privilege to be part of this conversation. [...]

In welcoming Chiara Lubich to St. Mary's, I'm conscious that although this is your first visit, the Focolare has a long association with the college, not only through Focolare members who are alumni, but also because the very first Focolare summer gatherings took place here in 1966, 1967 and 1968. So it's a homecoming for the Movement! You are all welcome home!

Chiara Lubich is the founder and president of the Focolare Movement which began in Trent in northern Italy in 1943. Her spiritual insights have inspired academics, theologians, sociologists and politicians of diverse persuasions to apply her thoughts and teachings to their own field of endeavour, with far-reaching results. Unity is the keynote of the many dialogues Chiara has initiated and nurtured in Europe since the late 1950s with Christians of all persuasions and later with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Jews.

In recent years, her work has been publicly acknowledged in various ways. For example, in 1998, the Council of Europe awarded her the Human Rights Prize and in 1996, UNESCO presented her with the Prize for Peace Education. She has also spoken to many groups of politicians in the United Nations headquarters (in New York), in various European parliaments and in many other European countries. Thousands of people who have no religious affiliation, but who are actively committed to specific projects, are a living testimony to her charism of unity at the service of humanity. Over 700 businesses of different sizes in various parts of the world have adopted the altruistic principles of her economic project, called the 'Economy of Communion', which she launched in Brazil in 1991. These businesses give proof of the economic significance of channelling one third of their profits into relief of poverty and the creation of work opportunities in disadvantaged regions.

Since 1996, the Focolare's Movement for Unity in Politics has sought to bring the insight of the spiritual charism of unity to the world of party politics. Its key ideas have been presented to citizens and politicians in many countries. It's my great privilege to welcome you, Chiara, and to thank you for making this journey here. I'd like to ask you all to join me in welcoming her.

## Address by Chiara Lubich

My Lord Bishops, the rector of St. Mary's College, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great joy for me to be here this evening in this time-honoured St. Mary's College of the University of Surrey. The subject entrusted to me in the series of talks on mission and evangelisation is entitled: 'Ecclesial Movements and the Marian Profile of the Church'.

The flowering of ecclesial movements is certainly one of the Spirit's gifts to our times. John Paul II himself said this. From the beginning of his pontificate he has always considered them as a great spiritual resource and as a 'motive of hope' for the Church and for humanity.<sup>12</sup>

These movements came into great evidence in the Catholic Church on the eve of Pentecost, 1998. St. Peter's Square in Rome, as well as the nearby streets and squares, were filled with three to four hundred thousand people. They had gathered around Pope John Paul II who wished to entrust to them and to those who were following the event on radio or television, and also to entrust to history, an absolutely unexpected announcement: his vision of the Church today.

He affirmed that just as there is the institutional, hierarchical aspect of the Church, which is very important and essential, essential too is the charismatic aspect of the Church, which is in profound communion with the first. This latter aspect is the effect of the various charisms given by the Holy Spirit to the Church, his Bride, down through the centuries and which are present now also in the new movements and new ecclesial communities.

In this way the Holy Father assigned to us, members of more than sixty ecclesial movements present on that day, our place in the Church. We were – this is what he said – 'a significant expression' of the charismatic aspect of the Church, 'although not the only one'.<sup>13</sup> The joy that filled our hearts on that day was indeed immense.

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<sup>12</sup> Homily given on the Vigil of Pentecost, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, XIX/1*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996, 1373.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, *Message to the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities*, 27 May 1998, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19980527\\_movimenti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980527_movimenti.html), accessed 28 June 2022.

## Ecclesial Movements and the Marian Profile of the Church

In view of this event, we can ask ourselves: who could have prompted the Holy Father to speak in this way? Undoubtedly it was the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, knowing his great devotion to the Mother of God and thinking of the bond which Mary, who is filled with charisms, has with all that concerns these gifts, we must think that the Holy Father was prompted to do so also by Mary. Aren't we speaking of her as we consider the Marian profile today, here in this country that glories in being Mary's dowry?

Hans Urs von Balthasar, the well-known and distinguished Swiss theologian, wrote in-depth about the Marian profile. He affirmed that, in the Church, which is the Bride of Christ, there are two distinct profiles or principles in communion with one another: the Petrine profile, expressed by the Popes, who continue the role of Peter, and by the hierarchy; and the Marian profile, which is the presence of Mary throughout the centuries in all the many ancient and modern charisms, charisms which enrich and beautify the Church with religious families, with ecclesial movements and new communities. This Marian profile reminds us that the Church is built not only on the apostles, but also on the prophets. It is made manifest in the charismatic aspect, in the aspect which is prophetic, spiritual, concerning holiness, an aspect which has always been found in the Church and is still found today.

For von Balthasar, the Petrine profile, the hierarchical principle is linked to the external structures of the Church, to the objective holiness of Scripture, the sacraments, ministries, and includes other elements, like canon law. The Marian principle is linked to the subjective holiness found in Mary and lived out in a dynamic manner in all that leads to the Church's sanctity. The institutional structure is ordered towards the Marian profile, and the Marian principle, unlike the Petrine profile, will last for all eternity.<sup>14</sup>

In his Christmas address to the Roman Curia on the occasion of the 1987 Marian Year, the Pope spoke of the relationship between these two profiles, saying: 'Mary, the Immaculate one, precedes everyone else, including obviously Peter himself and the Apostles. (...)' The Pope continued: 'A contemporary theologian' – he was alluding to von Balthasar – 'has well

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<sup>14</sup> Brendan Leahy, *The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, New York: New City Press, 2000.

commented: “Mary is Queen of the Apostles without any pretensions to apostolic powers: she has other and greater powers.”<sup>15</sup>

But if the Marian profile is so important in the Church and if the ecclesial movements are one of its significant expressions, let us try to understand how men, women, young people and adults, priests, religious and bishops can, through the ecclesial movements, pattern themselves on Mary. Let’s understand how they can imitate her, indeed, in a certain way, ‘relive her’ so that she may be present – as much as possible – on earth.

Within these modern movements, several spiritualities have flowered that are both providential and necessary for our times. In fact, the Holy Spirit is never sparing in giving to the Church, from time to time, spiritualities for which the Church feels a special need. At times they are almost like medicine for the evils of a particular era, or give new energy to people so that they can live the Gospel with greater fullness.

This is the case also with the ecclesial reality I represent: the ‘Focolare Movement’. This too is an expression of the Marian profile of the Church. Von Balthasar, who knew our movement, was convinced of this and he wrote about it. Mary certainly seems to be at work in this movement, offering a spirituality that is communitarian, universal, all hers, the ‘spirituality of unity’. It teaches many women and men to be authentic Christians today, following her example. The various aspects of Christian life which the Holy Spirit underlined in our spirituality can be found in more or less the same way and expressed more or less explicitly in the spiritualities of other movements, too.

This ‘spirituality of unity’ has in recent years been the object of a rather special destiny in the Catholic Church. In fact, at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte* [At the Beginning of the New Millennium], promoted it as the spirituality of the Church using the term, ‘the spirituality of communion’. In letters that he wrote to our bishops [Friends of the Focolare], he affirmed that it is exactly the same as the spirituality of unity.

In this spirituality, Mary gives precise and very important guidance to people of our times. We know that today, as always, people want to find a reason for living. In the Western

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<sup>15</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Nuovi punti fermi*, Jaca, 1980, 181 (Italian translation of *Neue Klarstellungen*).

world, for instance, there is a search for self-fulfilment which, however, actually aims more at having than at being. In practice, this way of seeing things is translated above all into a desire for well-being and freedom in all fields: this way of seeing things is quite limited and full of pitfalls.

And so Mary speaks – through this ‘spirituality of unity’ or ‘of communion’ – to the hearts of people today. She invites them not to make of wellbeing or futile ideals, all of which are destined to pass, the primary goal of life, but to do as she did and make God the ideal of our lives. Mary lived for God; her life was faith in and love of God. God was everything for her. It is only God, on the other hand, who gives full meaning to our life on earth; he alone assures us of the next life, which exists and which will never end, even though people today often do not take this into account.

Yes, in order to accomplish something true, effective and great in our lives, we too, the men and women of today, must make this great conversion: no longer putting ourselves, our tastes and pleasures at the centre of our interests, but God.

How does Mary present God to people today? She presents him as he truly is, as Love. God, in reality, is Love. We need to realise this.

But if this is so, we will soon understand that we are not alone in managing our lives. There is Someone with us who cares for us, who loves us, who is more a Father to us than our earthly father. We will understand that if such a Father was able one day to send his Son on earth to die for us, we can be sure that he will intervene in all our other needs.

Jesus explains the Father’s love in this way: ‘Even the hairs of your head are all counted’ (Lk. 12.7). ‘Therefore, do not worry, saying: “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” (...) Your heavenly Father knows you need all these things’ (Mt. 6.31).

Therefore, to believe in God who is Love. To be able to say of ourselves what John the Evangelist wrote: ‘And we have believed in love’ (see 1 Jn 4.16). But we should not limit ourselves to believing that God loves all people. Mary teaches us that we must respond to his love with our love. We have to love God in return.



We might think at times that loving God is a question of words or feelings. No, loving God means doing his will. This means that we should adapt ourselves to his plan of love for us, because he truly does have a plan for each one of us, which is always wonderful, rewarding, and brings happiness.

Many people today plan out their lives by themselves, usually aiming towards a high status in society. Work is seen as a means to achieve this. Free time is geared almost exclusively towards searching for experiences, friendships, pleasures. An exaggerated amount of time and importance is given to travelling, for example, to entertainment and shows, as if these were everything.

It's clearly a plan which has lost any Christian dimension, which gives fleeting happiness here on earth and certainly does not prepare people for the next life. To decide, instead, to accomplish in the course of our life not our own will, but the will of God who loves us as only God can – to do as Mary did – is to be ready to make our life into a wonderful, divine adventure. Those who have done this know what extraordinary surprises are in store.

In fact, by doing God's will, the Lord responds to our love with his love. If we generously give to our neighbours, to all our brothers and sisters, he abundantly fills us with goods. If we seek his kingdom, he gives us more than what is necessary. If we put him in the first place in our hearts, even before our relatives and every good we have, he gives us a hundred times as much. And with the hundredfold, he also gives us eternal life. Let's try it. It's really true!

We have to do God's will, therefore, and above all, the will of God expressed in a special command: love of neighbour. It's very important because Jesus considers done to himself what we do to others. At the end of our lives we will be examined on love. Do you remember? 'I was hungry,' Jesus will say to us at the final judgment, 'and you gave me food' (Mt. 25.35-36).

However, Christian love does not go in one direction alone. It is not directed only towards others. Love should also return to us. In fact, the pearl of the Gospel is mutual love, reciprocal charity, which is the characteristic of Christians. Jesus said: 'Love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 15.12). Mary, all taken up as she was with her Jesus, reminds us that this

commandment is particularly important to him because he calls it his and says that it is new. It's the summary of the Gospel. The fact is that when Jesus came on earth, he did not come from nothingness as each one of us did, but he came from heaven. It's like when an emigrant goes to a distant country, he adapts himself to his new environment, but also brings his own ways and customs with him, and often continues to speak his own language. Likewise, Jesus adapted himself here on earth to the life of every person, but he brought with him – because he was God – the lifestyle of heaven, the lifestyle of the Trinity, which is love, reciprocal love.

The early Christians had understood Jesus' teaching on mutual love. They had grasped that it was the focal point of the Good News and they put it into practice with great zeal. As a matter of fact, the people who observed them said: 'See how they love one another... how they are ready to die for one another.'<sup>16</sup> By loving one another as Jesus loved us, a surprising supernatural reality will come about in our lives. Jesus will be spiritually present among us because he said: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name,' as he wants, and therefore, in mutual love, 'I am there among them' (Mt. 18.20).

Mary cannot but love this presence of Jesus among her children. She who gave Jesus physically to the world wants nothing more than to see him living spiritually among Christians today. So we need to commit ourselves to living mutual charity with all our heart. If we do so, we will be able to spread Christianity widely and effectively in the secularised society around us. It is precisely by seeing our mutual love that the men and women also of our day will believe. Jesus said: 'That they may all be one,' in love, 'so that the world may believe' (Jn 17.21).

This is what the first Christians experienced. Such was the divine strength that emanated from this way of living Christianity that before long they had spread to practically all parts of the world known at that time. As Tertullian affirmed: 'We were born yesterday, and yet we have already invaded the entire world...'<sup>17</sup> This is a wonderful and simple ideal, which cannot but attract us, too!

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<sup>16</sup> Tertullian, *Apologetico*, edited by A. Resta Barrile, Mondadori, 1980, 145.

<sup>17</sup> Tertullian, cit., cap. 37,4, 139.



So to sum up: to choose God who is Love as the ideal of our life, to do his will, to love our neighbour and to love one another: these are the initial teachings that Mary offers us through the spirituality of unity.

But there is more: Mary also gives people today a new explanation of suffering, of the suffering which all of us, sooner or later, encounter in life.

In contemporary society, suffering is viewed with fear because it is not understood. Even the different forms of entertainment, television, and advertising tend to present only images of wellbeing and security. Above all, death is something people would like to exorcise, almost as if it did not exist. Anything that makes people suffer is considered solely as misfortune.

What meaning, instead, does suffering have for Mary? What is the best way to face it? The person who explained it to us with his words and with his own life was Jesus. He suffered and he died. Certainly everything was caused by the men who condemned, scourged and crucified him. But he always saw another, deeper meaning in his suffering and death. He suffered and died for us in order to reunite us to God, since we had separated ourselves from him by sinning, and to reunite us to one another.

From the time Jesus was on the cross, our suffering too, all suffering has acquired a meaning similar to his. People obviously suffer because of negative factors like accidents, illnesses and misfortunes.... But God who is Love for us, as he was for Jesus, unveils another purpose for each person's suffering. Through suffering people contribute to their own perfection, to their own holiness; or they contribute towards that of their brothers and sisters. In this way, they and others will rise again – as Jesus did – to full and everlasting life.

The saints were familiar with this new way of understanding suffering. In fact, in every suffering that they experienced, they did not see only the external, material and earthly aspects. Rather, they discerned in it the hand of God who permitted everything so that with Christ they could work for their own spiritual good and that of others. Looking at the Crucified Christ, they grasped the value of suffering. For this reason, they identified themselves with it and found union with God.

Today, according to the experience of the Focolare Movement, Our Lady points out to us a particular suffering of Jesus, the supreme suffering at the climax of his passion when he cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt. 27.46). In that terrible moment, the Son of God had the impression that the Father, who was one with him, had abandoned him. And the anguish he experienced in his inmost being was of such depth that it cannot be explained. In his divine heart he experienced the separation from God which human beings had brought upon themselves through sin, with all its consequences. He felt all the weight of our sins that he took on himself. But despite all this, he abandoned himself once again to the Father with total trust, 'Father,' he said, 'into your hands I commend my spirit' (Lk. 23.46).

By focusing our attention on Jesus crucified and forsaken, Mary wants to help us find the strength to overcome every difficulty. If our heart, too, suffers, in a certain way, the abandonment by God, spiritual aridity, darkness or confusion, or if we are gripped by doubt or by the burden of our sins, we will think of him. Going deep into our hearts, we will tell him that we want to do as he did. We want to accept suffering. We will say our 'yes' to him. In this way our union with God will grow and we will help others to find this union or to strengthen it.

Finally, Mary extends another invitation to people of our times through the spirituality of unity. She directs them towards universal fraternity, towards the unity of the human family. Even though our planet is afflicted by many tensions, and today even by terrorism, in various ways Mary urges people on towards unity: it's a sign of the times! And Mary wants this everywhere. She wants families to be united, the different generations to be united. She calls for unity among ethnic groups, races, among nations, among Christians, and as much as possible, with the faithful of other religions and, at least on an operative level, unity with all people who do not have any religious affiliation or formal faith, but who seek the good of the human person. Mary loves all humanity and she wants it to be united in one single family. She wants universal fraternity. Love is inscribed in the DNA of every man and woman, and it makes them capable of loving. If we too love them, fraternity becomes possible.

These are a few of the things the Mother of God has expressed through one movement in the Church. Millions of people are already following these indications, which are very universal, and they experience great spiritual joy and the resulting solutions to many



personal, family and social problems. They experience the transformation of themselves into authentic apostles of dialogue and of the civilization of love.

With Mary, the first lay person in the Church, and with her spirituality, many lay people like us will be able to rise to the task the Church asks of us in our times: that is, to work for our sanctification, which is the universal vocation of all Christians, to contribute to the renewal and expansion of the Church, and to animate with the Christian spirit all the areas of society we are involved in.

In this way, the characteristic contribution that the Marian profile brings to the Church will be much greater and everyone will see the Church as being more beautiful, more holy, more dynamic, more like a family. It will be a Church that is loving, welcoming, better oriented towards its new frontiers: that of ecumenism, of interreligious dialogue, of dialogue with people of no formal faith. It will continually have new developments and new vocations. It will be a charismatic Church, a Marian Church, more missionary, more evangelizing. And all of this will be for the glory of God and his Mother. (Applause)

**Father Michael Hayes:** Now we have time for some questions.<sup>18</sup>

### **Question 1**

Chiara, thank you so much for your beautiful talk. I was just wondering, could you say some more about how Mary can be a help, rather than an obstacle, in the field of ecumenism?

**Chiara:**

Mary certainly helps us in the ecumenical field. The ecumenical problem is this one: division amongst the churches. What is necessary is a mother, because all people are destined to be one family with only one Father, God. So there is no better remedy than Mary for the ecumenical problem. However, I am convinced that this idea is also beginning to enter into those Christian churches that are less inclined to consider Mary.

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<sup>18</sup> Only the questions with a Marian focus are included in this document.

I'll give you an example. We had a very big meeting in Stuttgart on the topic of the future of Europe, on how to give a soul back to Europe. There were some very important politicians there as well, including Queen Fabiola from Belgium. We know that among the Evangelical Lutheran Christians, Mary is a little less loved perhaps than she is amongst us. Perhaps because in the past, we exaggerated this devotion a little and this didn't help people to understand Mary.

The person who ended this extraordinary day in Stuttgart was an Evangelical Lutheran, who said: 'Why don't we invite Queen Fabiola to come up on stage and lead all of us in the "Our Father"?' So Queen Fabiola came up on the stage and stood with all of us of the various movements, and led a really beautiful "Our Father" with all of us, all 10,000 people who were there. And then, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, she began the "Hail Mary".

Afterwards, we asked the person who had invited her up, this leader who was a marvellous Evangelical Lutheran: 'What do you think about Queen Fabiola leading the "Hail Mary"?' Because it was very unexpected. He said: 'She was a queen who prayed to the queen.' And so he was delighted.

So we need to have trust. Mary will open the way. She's too beautiful, she's too real. How can you love her Son without loving the mother? And such a mother! A mother who is immaculate, and who has so many other qualities.

### **Question 2**

Thank you very much for your talk. I would like to ask a specific question in the context of the Catholic Church. You summarised Mary's role. I wanted to ask you about one thing. There was in the past a large movement that asked the Holy Father to promulgate a dogma on Mary as intermediary of all graces, proclaiming her Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix. The Church made the decision that the time was not opportune for this kind of declaration. My question is: do you think it would be opportune that we ask for this again?



**Chiara:**

According to me, it's opportune that everything would be stated very clearly, and what is very clear is that we have only one mediator, Jesus. In fact, this present Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has changed the consecration to Mary into entrustment to Mary precisely so as to avoid confusion.

But since you have asked for my own opinion, I think that to go to Mary to obtain graces is logical. It happens in the family. For example, you might say to your brother: 'I know that Dad listens to you more than me, so would you ask him if I can go and do this or that?' So if we do it in our own family with our brother or sister, we can certainly do it with Mary because she has connections, as it were. So we can do it.

The important thing is to have very clear ideas. Then you'd have to see how this dogma would be stated. If it corresponds to these truths which I have stated, then maybe it would be okay, but I really don't know if we need a dogma for these things. Perhaps we should ask one of the priests who is here or one of the bishops.

**Father Michael Hayes:**

I think that when the movements work in connection with the local dioceses, extraordinary things always happen. And we're very blessed tonight to have several bishops, both Roman Catholic and Anglican, here with us. Thank you for being with us!

I'd like to ask Bishop Malcolm McMahon, the Bishop of Nottingham, to thank Chiara, on behalf of all of us, for joining us and for her wonderful presentation this evening.

**Bishop Malcolm McMahon:**

Chiara, many of us have read your books and this evening, it's been just wonderful to hear your words. We often see your leaflets with the monthly Words of Life and this evening your words have certainly given us life. Personally, I am very happy to have been here and listened to you. You have given us a wonderful image of the Marian profile of the Church. I

## Ecclesial Movements and the Marian Profile of the Church

would have like to have had this talk before this, in the 3-4 years that I have participated in discussions between Roman Catholics and Anglicans on the role of Mary, after which a document was published. It's a wonderful document and I am sure that in the long run it will help our ecumenical relationships, even though for now we don't see how it can be useful in the near future. Unfortunately, I cannot tell you now about everything it says, but I just want to say that what you told us tonight is the content of that document.

For us in the Church here in England and in Wales, Mary has always had a very special place. We say that England is the 'dowry of Mary', and this college, of course, has been dedicated to her as well. Thus to see Mary as the first disciple of Christ, someone who is open to God and at the service of others, helps us to understand the very special role we have in the 'new evangelisation' which is expected of us, to which we are challenged by the Holy Father. We too, I think, can embody the love of God for us just as Mary did, and this attitude can do a lot to overcome some of the resistance we experience in this country – resistance to religion, to the way in which God works, and perhaps even, I dare say, to the new ecclesial movements.

In fact, with our Anglo-Saxon temperament, it has taken a long time to welcome the new movements in the Church, and yet we can see wonderful things happening at the moment. The Catholic Church of England and Wales has taken on itself a new challenge for evangelisation, to support the work that is already happening in our dioceses and in the parishes, and in every other area. The Church is still very alive and active in our islands.

So Chiara, I want to thank you very much for coming to speak to us this evening. I have found, and I'm sure I'm speaking for everyone here, that your words have truly been an inspiration. And I also want to thank you for honouring us with your presence.