

What is Impossible for the Isolated and Separated Millions . . .

Chiara Lubich

At the close of the centenary of Chiara Lubich's birth, we publish here excerpts from a June 19, 2004 speech, "What future for a multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious society?" given at Westminster Central Hall in London before an interreligious audience. It was one of Lubich's last speeches, one that preceded a lengthy period of illness, prior to her death on March 14, 2008. With the charisma of unity given to her, Chiara addresses situations and ongoing developments that are now much more evident today than they were at that time and charts a fundamental course by which to respond. Subheadings are those of the editors.



In recent years, our European societies are being changed by significant patterns of migration from east to west and from south to north. This phenomenon is having a profound impact on the appearance of our continent, bringing to our cities an ever-greater diversity. We see it as we walk down the streets and note the presence of mosques, for instance, but also of many temples in countries which, until a short while ago, were almost exclusively Christian.

At the same time, the communications media bring people and nations, although in reality very distant, close to one another to the point that what takes place in Asia or in Africa can have a decisive impact on the personal choices of Western youth. No one is "foreign" to us any longer because we "see" people, because we know about them.

Furthermore, economic and financial globalization has woven together all our interests. They are no longer separated from one another. Many problems are of interest to humanity as a whole, problems which no nation can face in isolation from all the others. In a word, we live in a world that has truly become, as people say, "a global village": — a new and complex village.

This situation opens up opportunities for knowledge and development previously unknown, even though fears, indifference and intolerance remain [. . .]

Rather than Shutting Down, 'Live the Other'

It is a matter of weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice. Making ourselves one: it is the attitude that guided the apostle Paul, who wrote that he made himself a Jew with the Jews, Greek with the Greeks, all things to all (see 1 Cor 9:19-22). It is very important that we follow his example so that we can establish a sincere, friendly dialogue with everyone.

Yes, dialogue – a word especially suited to our times. Dialogue means that people meet together and even though they have different ideas, they speak with serenity and sincere love towards the other person in an effort to find some kind of agreement that can clarify misunderstandings, calm disputes, resolve conflicts, and even at times eliminate hatred. This dialogue, especially among the faithful of different religions, today is more indispensable than ever if we want to avoid the great evils threatening our societies. [...]

It is a matter of momentarily putting aside even the most beautiful and greatest things we have: our own faith, our own convictions, in order to be “nothing” in front of the other person, a “nothingness of love.” By doing so we put ourselves in an attitude of learning, and in reality, we always have something to learn.

If we are motivated by this kind of love, other people will be able to express themselves because they feel accepted. They can give themselves because they find someone who listens. So, then we become acquainted with their faith, their culture, their way of speaking. We enter their world, in some way we become enculturated in them and we are enriched. This attitude enables us to contribute to making our multicultural societies become intercultural, that is, made up of cultures open to one another and in a profound dialogue of love with one another.

Our complete openness and acceptance then predispose the other person to listen to us. We have noticed, in fact, that when people see someone dying to self in order to “make him or herself one” with others, they are struck by this and often ask for an explanation.

This leads us then to what the Pope calls “respectful proclamation.” “Respect” is the key word in every dialogue. Being true to God, to ourselves, and being sincere with our neighbor, we share what our faith affirms on the 340 Part Three: Reflections of Light upon the World subject we are discussing, without imposing anything, without any trace of proselytism, but only out of love.

However, through the Holy Spirit who is always present when we love, our brothers or sisters are struck by something we say, something alive and spiritual which echoes within them. These are the “seeds of the Word” which the love of God has placed in every religion. Or while we are speaking, our brothers or sisters identify some aspect of those purely human values that the Lord, in creating us, planted in the core of every person and in every culture.

And on the basis of these “seeds” or values we can offer – always serving, however, always with gentle and boundless discretion – those aspects of truth we possess which can give greater fullness and completeness to what our neighbor already believes. First, he or she gave to us; now we do the same. And in an atmosphere of communion created by this exchange of gifts, the truth is gradually revealed, and we feel that it has brought us closer to one another. [...]

Real, true, heart-felt fraternity is, in fact, the fruit of a love capable of making itself dialogue, relationship, that is, a love that, far from arrogantly closing itself within its own boundaries, opens itself toward others and works together with all people of goodwill in order to build together unity and peace in the world.

Build a Global Community of Peoples

[...] we need to spread among as many people as possible the idea and practice of fraternity, and – given the vastness of the problem – a universal fraternity. Brothers and sisters know

how to look after one another, they know how to help one another, they know how to share what they have.

And to meet this unprecedented challenge, the contribution of religions is decisive.

From whom, if not from the great religious traditions, could a strategy of fraternity begin, a strategy capable of marking a turning point even in international relations?

The enormous spiritual and moral resources of religions, the contribution of ideals, of aspirations to justice, of commitment to the neediest, along with the political leverage of millions of believers, all springing from religious sentiments and channeled into the field of human relations, could undoubtedly be translated into actions that could have a positive influence on the organization among nations.

Much is being done in the field of international solidarity by non-governmental organizations. What is missing is for states in their own right to make political and economic choices that can build a worldwide community of peoples committed to bringing about justice.

In the face of a strategy of death and hatred, the only effective response is to build peace in justice. But there is no peace without fraternity. Only fraternity among individuals and peoples can guarantee a future where there is peaceful coexistence.

The Secret of Success: God's presence among us

Our experience tells us that whoever wants to move the mountains of hatred and violence in today's world faces a task that is enormous. But what is beyond the strength of millions of separated, isolated individuals becomes possible for those who make mutual love, understanding of one another and unity the driving force of their lives.

And for all this there is a reason, a secret key, and a name. When we, of the most various religions, enter into dialogue among ourselves, that is, when we are open to one another in a dialogue of human kindness, of mutual esteem, of respect, of mercy, we are also opening ourselves to God and, in the words of John Paul II, "we let God be present in our midst."

This is the great effect of our mutual love and the hidden strength that gives vitality and success to our efforts to bring unity and universal fraternity everywhere. It is what the gospel proclaims to Christians when it says that if two or more are united in genuine love, Christ himself is present among them and therefore in each one of them.

And what greater guarantee can there be than the presence of God, what greater help can there be for those who want to be instruments of fraternity and peace?