

Followers of different religions at Castel Gandolfo

“A revolutionary journey that did much good”

Roberto Catalano

"This was a revolutionary journey that did much good for the Church. It is an experience animated by the Holy Spirit, rooted, we can say, in the heart of Christ, in his thirst for love, communion and fraternity." These words of Pope Francis, in his address to participants at the May 31 - June 4 interreligious conference held at the Mariapolis Center in Castel Gandolfo (Rome) and in the city of Assisi, summarize that event and offer the real key to understanding it. And one cannot appreciate the full ecclesial and human depth experienced by the initial 380 participants - which later grew to 500 people from 40 countries on the final 'open day' on June 4 - without considering the prophetic dimension of Chiara Lubich's charism of communion in the context of dialogue.

Chiara was born in a traditionally Catholic context in Trent, Italy, a region that was a bridge between the Mediterranean and Central Europe, to a family with its own diverse religious and political orientations. Her commitment to dialogue, first ecumenical and later interreligious, during the course of her life (1920-2008), emerged increasingly as something practical and innovative in the Church.

If we consider carefully the shortest of the Vatican II documents, *Nostra Aetate*, it seemingly appears as if the Spirit brought about an unexpected initial inspiration, one emblematic of a radical paradigm shift in relations between the Church and the faithful of other religions. Yet even a conciliar document changes little without practical, pastoral tools of daily commitment and effective collaboration, like those that have emerged from recent charisms which have been able to contribute to its implementation. This recent conference highlighted how the spirituality of communion promoted by Chiara Lubich, if lived with faithfulness and constancy, can generate relationships capable of overcoming barriers of all kinds (ethnic, social, religious, etc.). This interreligious experience was the fruit of decades of such relationships built over time, with people of different religious and cultural traditions.

In an era of rampant polarization and political tension, with often devious manipulations under the pretext of religion, the conference participants offered an unequivocal witness and spoke with forceful conviction in a manner that powerfully mirrored the title of the meeting: *One Human Family*. It could seem a dream or a risky statement made by someone naïve as to what is happening in the world. Yet, it was above all, a lived reality not only of dialogue but of true fraternity. We did not try to be politically correct by avoiding sensitive issues which fill the media and could conceal tensions. Far from it. Our sharing was clear and respectful. There was a willingness to listen to topics on religion and peace, religions and international relations, religion and artificial intelligence, and care for our common home, with diverse sensitivities emerging in discussions around hot topics. But we held these tensions, and more than this, we discovered the richness that the other brings.