

Official Translation

New York, May 28, 1997

Address to the Symposium at the United Nations Headquarters:

Toward a Unity of Nations and a Unity of Peoples

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to be here in the United Nations, this worldwide organization which brings together 185 member States, "united" for the main purpose of "maintaining international peace and security".

This purpose, as stated in its charter, is pursued through respect for the fundamental rights of persons and nations, economic collaboration among all countries and the social development of each nation. Its activities have been aimed at eliminating the many scourges afflicting humanity: war, the arms race, the denial of the fundamental freedoms of each member of the human family, as well as hunger, illiteracy, and poverty.

This, we know, is the new concept of "peace and security" that has been entrusted to the United Nations: peace no longer intended as the absence of war, but as the result of conditions which generate peace.

It is therefore an organization deserving of our praise. And not only does it have the approval of the world community; it also has heaven's blessing, if we believe the statement of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God" (Mt. 5:9).

I come to you today, representing a Movement which is actively present in practically all the nations of the world. And although it is much smaller and less well-known, it still has something in common with this great and celebrated organization.

In fact, our Movement, known as the Focolare, also aims at bringing peace into the world. It is present in more than 300 Christian Churches and in many other religions. And its membership also includes people of good will who have no specific religious belief.

As it seeks to build unity among individuals, among groups and among nations; as it dreams of a future in which the world will be truly united, it is a force for peace in the world.

It proposes, promotes and builds peace not at high-level meetings, as the United Nations does, but among ordinary people of every language, race, nationality and religion.

But what is the bond of unity? What creates peace?

It is the love that lives deep in the heart of every human being. For the followers of Christ, this love can be a participation in the very love that is the life of God. It is a love that is strong, capable of loving even those who do not reciprocate but instead attack us as enemies. It is a love capable of forgiving.

For those who follow other religions, this love is often called benevolence and is expressed by the Golden Rule which is a beautiful tenet of many religions: "Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you."

For people who do not have a religious faith, love can mean philanthropy, solidarity, non-violence.

It is love, therefore, a human-divine love which does not exclude purely human love, and which joins men and women, children and the elderly, persons of all walks of life, making them all of one heart. This has consequences on both the spiritual and material levels: in varying degrees, everyone shares what they have in an atmosphere of peace.

Because of the Focolare Movement's vocation to unity and peace, in representing it here today, I feel at home, and I feel urged from within to offer the Movement's collaboration at a grass-roots level. As many of you know, the Focolare Movement is present in the United Nations through its offshoot, the New Humanity Movement, which is more directly involved in society. As a non-governmental organization (NGO), it enjoys a type B consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

This presence confirms the Focolare Movement's interest in and readiness to assist all those distinguished representatives of the peoples of the United Nations and its highly qualified officials, who seek tirelessly day after day to keep abreast of what is happening throughout the world and to interpret these events, endeavoring to be present wherever peace is compromised, the world's equilibrium is threatened, human rights are violated or development is reduced to a far-off objective.

In addition, I would like to offer the Focolare Movement's collaboration in another way: by providing you with a brief overview of the spirituality which motivates us and which is the key to our experience of unity and peace among people of all kinds. I hope you will find this presentation to be of interest.

Our spirituality, modern and timely, is called the spirituality of unity. It has given rise to a new way of life that has been adopted by millions of people. This lifestyle is inspired by Christian principles, but it also emphasizes parallel values in other faiths and cultures. It has brought this world of ours - which is constantly striving to secure peace or strengthen it - a certain measure of peace and unity.

This spirituality is not something to be lived solely on one's own, but with others, together. It has a distinct community dimension.

It is rooted in a number of statements or truths found in the Gospel, which are all interrelated. Here I will mention just a few.

First of all, the spirituality of unity is based on an understanding that God is a God of Love, a Father.

In fact, how can we conceive of peace and unity in the world without a vision of humanity as one family? And how can this be so, unless all have the same Father?

Therefore, we must open our hearts to God, who is a Father who does not abandon his children to their own designs but who desires to accompany them, protect them and help them; who never burdens us with more than we can bear, but who carries our burdens himself.

To believe in his love is what this new spirituality requires of us: to believe that we are personally and immensely loved by God, who reads the heart of each person and cares for each one of us personally, counting even the hairs of our head. He does not leave the renewal of society to us alone, but takes an active role.

Believe in his love! And from the thousands of choices that life offers us, intelligently choose him as the Ideal of our lives, as he will be for all eternity when we have reached the destiny to which we are all called.

But obviously it is not enough to believe in the love of God, not enough to have chosen him as one's Ideal. The Father's presence and loving care calls each person to be a true daughter or son, loving the Father in return and living, day by day, according to the Father's loving plan; in other words, doing his will.

And we know that a father's first desire is for his children to treat each other as brothers and sisters, to care for and love one another. He wants us to know and practice what we could refer to as "the art of loving" which we find in the Gospels.

This art of loving requires us to love everyone. We can make no distinctions between those who are pleasant or unpleasant; beautiful or ugly; fellow-citizen or foreigner; black, white, or yellow; African, Asian, American or European. To use a familiar expression, we can say that love knows no form of discrimination. For a Christian, moreover, everyone must be loved because it is Christ whom we love in each person. He himself will tell us: "You did it to me" (Mt. 25:40).

It also requires us to be first in loving, not waiting for the other person to love us first.

It requires us to love each person as ourselves. In the words of Gandhi: "You and I are one and the same thing. I cannot hurt you without harming myself."¹

It means knowing how to "make ourselves one" with others; that is, to make their worries, their thoughts, their sufferings, their joys, our own.

To give you an example of this love for others and its effectiveness in bringing down age-old barriers that previously seemed indestructible, I would like to share with you a recent experience.

Four months ago I went to Thailand. Some Buddhist monks had invited me to Chiang Mai, in the northern part of the country, to speak in a Buddhist university to students and professors and, in a temple, to Buddhist monks, nuns and lay people.

This was something quite unusual, and even more surprising if we consider that I had been requested to speak about my spiritual experience, when they knew well that I was a Christian.

You may wonder how this came about.

Some background will make it more understandable.

A Buddhist Great Teacher and one of his disciples, a learned and open person, had met members of the Movement in Asia and wanted to visit one of our little towns, called Loppiano near Florence, Italy, whose 700 inhabitants seek to live faithfully the Gospel message which generates peace and unity.

The two monks were deeply moved by the love they found there.

The disciple later told us: "I left my muddy shoes outside the door, and I found them clean in the morning.

¹ Quoted from WILHELM MÜHS, *Parole del cuore*, Milan, 1996, p. 82.

"I put my soiled robe outside the door, and I found it washed and ironed in the morning.

"They knew that I was cold because I was used to the South-East Asian climate, and they raised the thermostat and brought me blankets."

One day he asked: "Why are you doing this?"

"Because we love you" was the answer. It overwhelmed him.

In that little town, the two monks learned about Christian love and about the unity it generates among people.

They were enlightened concerning a number of truths of Christianity and in their enthusiasm over their experience, they invited me to speak to their disciples about this wonderful discovery: about love, and about the resulting unity and peace.

My stay in Thailand was a success, through God's grace and for his glory. A broad avenue was opened for a profound and mutually enriching dialogue. We admired their good will, their way of life, which has something heroic about it, and their wisdom.

Now we have made plans that will allow us to continue this relationship as brothers and sisters.

This demonstrates the value of love.

But if this love for others is lived together, it becomes mutual.

Christ, God the Father's Son *par excellence*, and every person's Brother, left a norm for humanity to live: mutual love. He knew how necessary this was for there to be peace and unity in the world, for all the world to be one family: a universal human family which goes beyond the limited concept of an international society, because within this family, the relationships among individuals, groups, and nations are designed to break down whatever divisions and barriers exist in any age.

Certainly whoever wants to move the mountains of hate and violence in today's world faces a huge and heavy task. But what is beyond the strength of millions of separate, isolated individuals begins to appear possible when people have made reciprocal love, mutual understanding and unity the motivating force of their lives.

There is a reason for this. Let me explain.

There is another important and precious element in this new spirituality, one that is awesome and surprising. It is linked to mutual love, and it is announced in the Gospels. It says that if two or more are united in genuine love, Christ himself, who is Peace, is present among them and therefore in each one of them.

And what greater guarantee, what greater opportunity can there be than this for those who want to be instruments of brotherhood and peace?

This mutual love and unity gives great joy to those who practice it. However, it calls for commitment, daily application and sacrifice.

And for Christians, this is where one particular word appears in all its brilliance and power. It's one that the world does not want to hear, a word it considers foolish, absurd, futile.

This word is the cross.

Nothing good, nothing useful, nothing fruitful for the world can be achieved without meeting and accepting weariness and suffering; in a word, without the cross.

Dedicating one's life to the cause of peace is a commitment not to be taken lightly! It calls for courage, knowing how to suffer.

Was it not the memory of the pain and suffering of World War II that gave rise to the United Nations? Out of the negative experience of division and conflict came the positive goal of integration among States and unity among Nations.

It is not by chance that the Focolare Movement was born in that same moment in history. Amidst the bombs and the darkness of that terrible war, a group of girls discovered the light of mutual love, and were ready to give their lives for one another. They decided to spread this love among persons, groups, and nations, without excluding or forgetting anyone.

Certainly, if more people accepted suffering out of love, the suffering that love requires, it would become the most powerful means of giving humanity its highest dignity; a dignity which lies in being not a collection of peoples living side by side and frequently in conflict with one another, but rather in being a single people, enriched by one another's diversity and safeguarding each one's identity.

But God, our loving Father, continually helps us in this arduous task.

And I cannot forget Mary, the Mother of Jesus and of every person on earth, who is also loved and venerated in other religions. In her, we can find inspiration, consolation and strength. For it is the mother who keeps the family together and reunites it time and time again.

But this communitarian spirituality is not necessarily tied to a particular Church or religion. It is universal and so, in one way or another, it can be lived by everyone.

In fact, it has given rise to a number of fruitful dialogues: with Christians from many Churches, with believers of various religions and with people of other ideological or philosophical persuasions. All find that this spirituality highlights the values in which they believe; and together we move toward that fullness of truth that all of us strive for.

Because of this spirituality, men and women of almost every nationality, wherever they may be, are slowly but surely trying to be seeds of a new people, of a more united world, a world at peace, one committed especially to those who are the weakest, the poorest.

Because of this spirituality, we feel the obligation to offer our contribution here, too, in this meeting place of nations, so as to give a spiritual boost to the efforts being made to render the United Nations an institution which will measure up to the expectations of humanity.

Furthermore, there is a general consensus on the part of leading figures in international life concerning the need to re-read the meaning of reciprocity, one of the cornerstones of international relationships. And reciprocity lies at the basis of our spirituality, and therefore, of all that we do. It is a reciprocity which calls us to go beyond the old or new logic of particular alliances, and instead to establish relations with everyone, as required by true love. It asks us to take the initiative, without pre-conditions and expectations. It leads us to see the other as our other self and therefore to view every type of initiative in these terms, whether it concerns disarmament, development, or cooperation.

It is a reciprocity capable of leading each person actively involved in international life to identify with the other and with the other's needs and capabilities; not only in emergency situations but in the circumstances of everyday life.

The goals and activities of the United Nations attest to the fact that peace today has new names. And it requires, first of all, a concerted effort on everyone's part, especially the United Nations, to eliminate the category of "enemy" - any enemy.

It is not enough to exclude war; the conditions must be created in which every people can love the other's country as its own, in a reciprocal, unselfish giving relationship.

May God, the Father of all, make our efforts to reach peace fruitful, together with the efforts of all who work towards this sublime goal. In the words of John Paul II on the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations: "... that the closing of the century and the coming millennium, might see the building of a civilization worthy of the human person, a true culture of freedom and peace.

"We can and must do this! And we shall see how the tears shed this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human spirit."²

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention. I assure you that we will not forget you, but we will remember you to the Prince of peace.

Chiara Lubich

² *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, N. 41, October 11, 1995, p. 10.