

The Unity of Humankind and a Culture of Peace

Jesús Morán, UNESCO, 15th November 2016

Madame Director General of UNESCO,

Your Excellencies,

Dear participants at this event on the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education awarded to Chiara Lubich. I gratefully welcome the opportunity generously given me to speak about the unity of humankind and a culture of peace.

Twenty years ago, in this prestigious hall, Chiara Lubich described the relationship established between the culture of unity and peace, by presenting the experience of the Focolare Movement in the world. She said this experience enables mutual recognition of each person's dignity, fosters a communitarian lifestyle and demolishes the artificial barriers that cause distrust, hostility and enmity. Above all she presented the fundamental idea of a new world order based on an understanding of peace which sees humankind as one family, with God the Father as the source of infinite love for all and for each person. And even though wars were not entirely absent from the world at that time, Chiara Lubich stressed many initiatives and experiences that pointed the way to unity among persons, communities and peoples.

The world was different twenty years ago. It was troubled by numerous conflicts that were for the most part localized and between recognisable warring parties. The following years revealed the harsh and painful reality of new wars. We remember the Arab Spring, the subsequent instability in the Middle East and the formation of the self-styled Islamic State. We have vivid memories of seeing the devastation of entire cities, the destruction of monuments and works of art. Twenty years ago no one would have thought that in Europe part of one country could be annexed by a bordering nation, as happened in Crimea. The recurrence of conflicts in Afghanistan and Myanmar, the coup in Thailand, conflicts between religious groups – and others - in Central Africa and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, seem to have put the clock back to a level of political instability that was less obvious twenty or so years ago.

War today is ever more varied. Not only is there war between nations but wars within nations, between ethnicities, political factions and religious communities. Sometimes it is fought by regular armies, sometimes by militias or mercenaries, or by unrecognisable “lone wolves” as in some terrorist attacks. The tools of war have changed too. It is clear that today's wars often occur on the new battlefields of financial and economic markets, to ensure supplies of raw materials and energy resources, and to open up new markets.

The rise and development of new conflicts means that cultures of peace themselves need to find new and up to date responses. Think for example of the culture of non-violence. It is a truly revolutionary force that seeks to build peace where there are the bloodiest wars. Its power lies in transforming injustice into opportunities to establish projects for peace and forgiveness. It is the response of those who, while being offended and persecuted, refuse to take up arms because they do not believe that warfare is a reasonable way to resolve conflicts. But today something new is happening, defenceless civilians are dying through terrorist attacks, they are unarmed, innocent and helpless, in other words they are non-violent, but without having chosen it. On the other hand, they did not even know they were in a battlefield. So what is non-violence when instead of being an ethical choice it becomes an unpredictable circumstance?

Some consider the culture of peace on the basis of normativism. Its theoretical foundation lies in the work of Immanuel Kant, *Zum Ewigen Frieden*¹ (*Towards eternal peace*), in which the Prussian philosopher set out not so much the ethical reasons, as the legal, rational and contractual reasons for peace between nations and communities. But current global scenarios have introduced new social actors who are indifferent to diplomacy, agreements and the negotiation of what can be gained or lost through international cooperation.

The spirituality of Chiara Lubich, centred on unity, can make a contribution to present-day cultures of peace. The Focolare Movement is involved in these fields, together with other organizations. It is present in about 180 countries around the world, and in many of them is like a presidium working for unity and peace. Allow me to mention that we have a Focolare community in Aleppo in Syria, which offers space for sharing and mutual solidarity to a people afflicted by war. There are vibrant communities in the central African countries I recently visited, where violence arising from intolerance creates victims almost daily. We have just held the *Congrès Musulman* of the Focolare Movement at Tlemcen in Algeria. It was also attended by Christians from different parts of the world and concluded with a final appeal to work more extensively and in greater depth to build up a culture of peace. We are also present and actively working for peace in Pakistan, and in Venezuela where intractable problems are causing social unrest. The first objective of these initiatives is, of course, the end of conflict and the establishment of peaceful civil society. But as contemporary history has so often shown us, peace building touches on deeper issues. In this sense the Focolare Movement works for social justice founded on the understanding that in our global world the future will always be shared, and that wars and local poverty will in any case have global repercussions. No one can save themselves; no one can hope to be happy on their own. Working for the common good and for other

¹ I. Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden*, 1795.

people's peace is key to being happy oneself; as figures like Zygmund Bauman and before him John Dewey and Karl Mannheim taught.

Focolare spirituality, in this sense, can make a useful contribution to the building up of a culture of peace. In fact Chiara Lubich defined it as a collective, communitarian spirituality. From the political point of view, one could believe this simply means that it comes about in association with a collective entity such as the State, a party, or a church. It is not so. Actually, among other things, modern history has shown us the terrible situation that collectivism causes when seeking to impose their ethical views and which included violation of individual freedoms, leading to wars, not peace.

Instead, the Focolare spirituality is distinguished from individual spiritualities by the fact that the latter are usually based on religious life acquired as a personal quest. The communitarian spirituality adds a new way to this personal quest, whereby we go to God together, united to the person of Christ (according to St John's Gospel: "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (Jn 17:21), and building unity among all "so that all may be one" (Jn 17:21).

So the centre of our experience is not a collective entity, nor an impersonal "we", but a person, the person of Jesus.²

It is Jesus, therefore, who brings his peace. Moreover, Jesus shows us the profound extent of what we should do to heal every wound, solve all problems, and settle every conflict. We should love as he loved us, to the point of dying on the Cross out of love for humankind. In this way we will not only follow him, in mutual love, but we will be with Him, we will act like him, and we will let him make history.

In Jesus, therefore, unity and peace are the same thing.

Now, this is our inspiration. Yet, while the desire for peace inspires all people of good will³, and this desire is written on every human heart, it is when this yearning moves from the heart to the mind and then becomes action that it becomes culture.

This type of culture of peace, based on the ideal of unity (as Chiara preferred to call it) is able to face today's challenges brought by ethical and religious pluralism. The coexistence

² Jesus can compose the rich and diverse mosaic of our communities. Peace is his gift because as Isaiah says: "O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, for indeed, all that we have done, you have done for us." (Is 26:12). Thomas Aquinas had already understood that this passage was the hermeneutical key to link human action to God's Providence. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentes*, III, 67.

³ Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, 1961, § 89.

of communities and peoples who have different understandings of the world is a challenge for peace. Certainly, peace cannot be brought about by one pacifist concept prevailing over others. No matter how laudable are the efforts to promote principles of tolerance, democracy, and harmony in all parts of the world, we cannot deceive ourselves that there are other concepts of what constitutes a good life; other principles of social ethics; or simply that the grammar of the ethics we are using do not correspond to that of other cultures.

The only solution is to engage in dialogue processes involving different cultures, different faiths, different world views, aimed at mutual recognition, international cooperation, the promotion of solidarity and the common good. These are the characteristics of a community based on a lifestyle that seeks unity. And when unity manifests itself, its power can generate peaceful solutions. Our thoughts turn to what happened this summer to Fr. Jacques Hamel who was murdered in the church of St. Etienne-de-Rouvray. That tragic incident led many Muslims to go to Christian churches for times of reflection and unity. That choice did more damage to terrorism than many political and military strategies.

This is the culture of peace that comes from unity. Its effectiveness was seen in Assisi last September, during the meeting for dialogue among religions and cultures, thirty years from the first big gathering initiated by St. John Paul II.

The Focolare Movement is at the service of such a vision, which is crucial to bringing peace to an increasingly interdependent world. Chiara Lubich's prophetic message, for which she was awarded this prize by UNESCO twenty years ago, is ever more relevant today.

Thank you.