

(English translation)

Geneva, 27 October 2002

The Renewal that the Charism of Unity Brings to the Churches and to Society

Dear brothers and sisters,

May Jesus be in our midst!

And he can be. He himself promised: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name – which for some Fathers of the Church means united in my love – I am in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). And there are more than two or three of us here....

On November 3rd the anniversary of the Reform is celebrated here in Geneva, a religious occasion which I hope will bestow the best spiritual gifts on all the Christians of the Reformed Churches, my beloved brothers and sisters.

On that day, one word will powerfully resound: “reform”.

Reform, a word which expresses the desire for renewal, change, almost rebirth.

A word which is special, attractive, which means life, more life.

A word which might also prompt a question: does the noun “reform”, the adjective “reformed” apply only to the Church whose centre is located in Geneva?

Or are these words applicable in some way to all the Churches? Indeed, were they not always characteristics of the Church?

The decree on ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council says: “Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is a human institution here on earth.”¹

And if we look carefully at the history of the Church, and in particular at the years in which we Christians were still united, we will see that Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, always intended, willed and oriented his Bride towards a continual reform, encouraging constant renewal.

This is why from time to time the Lord sent on earth gifts, charisms of the Holy Spirit which gave rise to new spiritual currents or religious Families. Through them he offered once again the sight of men and women who live the Gospel in a total and radical way.

This is the way it is in our times too, dear brothers and sisters. There are dozens and dozens of charisms spread in the Churches which are capable of bringing renewal. By way of example, I will tell you about the one called the “charism of unity” which gave life to the Focolare Movement.

This ecclesial reality, in fact, although born in one Church, the Roman Catholic Church, is now made up of people who belong to more than 350 Churches and ecclesial Communities.

Its aim is precisely that of collaborating towards unity among all Christians and towards universal brotherhood among all men and women on earth.

Its abundant fruits, its expansion around the world in 182 nations and its consistency of seven million people with 91 different languages tell us that so far, thanks be to God, it has been successful.

Furthermore, this Movement is remarkably timely, as we will see by analyzing together something of the present-day situation of our planet.

We are all familiar with the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development which was recently held in Johannesburg and which was described as “an ecological conversion”².

It set before the eyes of the world the terrible figures on poverty in which a large portion of humanity finds itself. Clearly, it is no longer possible to remain inert.

We must learn and the world must learn to bear in mind the plan that God has for humanity: we are all sisters and brothers, we are one family. ...

¹. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 6.

². See Holy See Intervention at the World Summit on Sustainable Development on 2 September 2002, in *L'Osservatore Romano* English Edition, n. 37, 11 September 2002.

This vision is not an absolutely new one. Witnesses of recent history like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa of Calcutta, the Dalai Lama and John Paul II have thought of it and deeply longed for it.

But more than anyone else, Jesus wants universal brotherhood if he prayed: "Father, may all be one" (see Jn 17:21).

In speaking of unity, he speaks of brotherhood; as Christians, we can and must find the model of brotherhood in the Trinity itself in whose life we can participate through our common baptism.

Unity. Unity and brotherhood.

Unity and brotherhood which, because of the charism of unity, the Focolare Movement is particularly committed to achieving.

The Movement witnesses and teaches that to live unity, one must start out from the love announced in the Gospel, that radical love which is so typically Christian. That love which, if it is accepted with attention and diligence, and put into practice, can offer great hope for this moment in history. ...

Those who have practiced this in the Focolare Movement, for instance, have experienced that love is the greatest power on earth: it unleashes the peaceful Christian revolution around those who live it so that Christians today can repeat what the early Christians said centuries ago: "We were born only yesterday and we have already spread all over the world."³

This Christian revolution touches not only the spiritual realm, but it also renews all expressions of human endeavours: cultural, philosophical, political, economical, educational, scientific, etc.

Love! What a great need there is for love in the world! And in us, Christians!

All together we Christians of various Churches number more than a billion people. Such a multitude should be quite visible. But, unfortunately, we are so divided that many do not see us, nor do they see Jesus through us.

He said that the world would recognize us as his own and, through us, would recognize him, by our reciprocal love, by unity: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

So our uniform, our distinctive characteristic was supposed to be reciprocal love, unity. Also the characteristic of his Church. But we didn't maintain full visible communion, nor do we have it now. Therefore, it is our conviction that also the Churches as such must love one another with this love. And we strive to work in this direction.

How often the Churches would seem to have forgotten the testament of Jesus, scandalizing the world with their divisions, while they should have been winning it for him!

If we look over our 2,000 year history, and in particular at the history of the second millennium, we cannot help but see that it has often been a series of misunderstandings, of quarrels, of conflicts which in many places have torn the seamless tunic of Christ which is his Church.

Certainly, this was caused by circumstances: historical, cultural, political, geographical, social.... But it was also caused by the fact that among us there was a lack of this unifying characteristic typical of us: love.

And so today, as we seek to make up for so much evil, to draw new strength for a fresh start, we must put all our confidence in this evangelical love. If we spread love and mutual love among the Churches, this love will lead the Churches, each one different from the other, to becoming a gift for the others, as John Paul II hopes for in his book: "It is necessary," he writes, "for humanity to achieve unity through plurality, to learn to come together in the one Church, even while presenting a plurality of ways of thinking and acting, of cultures and civilizations."⁴

My dear brothers and sisters, we have understood the point: our world today asks each one of us for love; it asks for unity, communion, solidarity.

And it also calls upon the Churches to recompose the unity that has been lacerated for centuries.

³. Tertullian, *Apologetico*, 37:7.

⁴. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Random House, UK, 1994, p.153.

This is the reform of all reforms which heaven is asking of us. It is the first and necessary step towards universal brotherhood with all men and women of the world. The world will believe if we are united. Jesus said so: "May all be one... that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).

God wants this! Believe me! And he repeats it and cries it out through the present-day circumstances which he permits.

May he give us the grace, if not to see all this accomplished, at least to prepare for its coming.

Chiara Lubich