

(English translation)

Budapest, 6 April 2003¹

Chiara's Message to the ecumenical youth meeting:

“What are you looking for?” (Jn 1:38)

“Dialogue of the people”

Dearest friends, a heartfelt greeting to all of you young people who have come together for this ecumenical meeting.

You probably know that in the context of this day entitled, “What are you looking for?”, I have been invited to offer you the singular experience of a group of people who have really found what they were looking for; an entire people that is coming to life in different parts of the world, made up of faithful of 350 different Churches. These Christians are all animated by a specific way of living, by a spirituality called “the spirituality of unity”, which some consider to be ecumenical, and which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The “spirituality of unity”, which blossomed in the Focolare Movement, has now become a patrimony of all because John Paul II has proposed it to the entire Catholic Church under the name of “spirituality of communion”.

The main points or foundations stones on which it stands have all emerged from the Gospel. Those who live it can become instruments for contributing towards the accomplishment of Jesus' testament: “Father, may all be one” (see Jn 17:21), that is, unity, and through it universal brotherhood. Unity and universal brotherhood, so necessary also in our times. As you know, today more than ever before, with the winds of war which threaten and terrorism which in fact terrorizes, our world needs coherence and solidarity. War divides people, indeed it massacres them; and terrorism causes immense harm, through resentment or vengeance, due especially to the inequality between rich and poor countries in the world. Therefore, more than ever before, it is necessary to aim at unity and to foster brotherhood everywhere, a brotherhood which can also generate the sharing of goods.

But how is it possible to kindle a brotherhood in the world that will draw all humanity into one single family? It can be done, certainly, by rediscovering who God is.

We Christians believe in God, we know that he exists, but while we see him as being all-perfect, all-knowing and all-powerful, we often consider him to be far from us, unapproachable, consequently we do not have a relationship with him.

John the Evangelist tells us who God is: “God is Love” (1 Jn 4:8) and for this reason he is our Father and the Father of all. Everything changes if we understand this statement in depth. If God is Love and he is our Father, he is close to us, to me, to each one of you, to us all; he follows our every step, he hides behind all the circumstances of our life, happy, sad or indifferent; he knows all about you, about us. Jesus tells us this, for example when he says: “Even the hairs of your head have all been counted” (Lk 12:7), counted by his love, by the love of a Father. Therefore, we must be certain that he loves us. But this is not enough: we must put God in the first place in our heart: before ourselves, before our possessions, before our dreams, before our relatives. Jesus says this very clearly: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:37).

This leads to another question: if God is Love, if he is our Father, what attitude should we have towards him? It's obvious: if he is the Father of all of us, we must behave as his children and as brothers and sisters to one another; in practice we should live that love which is the synthesis of the Gospel, everything that heaven expects of us.

However, our love towards our neighbor should not be an ordinary love, a simple friendship or only philanthropy, but that authentic love which the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts at baptism, the

¹ . Message taped by Chiara on 25 February 2003, in Rocca di Papa.

very love which lives in God. This love has specific qualities.

At this point, I would ask all of you young people to pay special attention!

This is not a limited love as human love is, directed almost exclusively to relatives and friends. It is directed to everyone: to the pleasant and the unpleasant, to fellow citizens and foreigners, to someone who belongs to my Church or to another, to my religion or to another, friend and enemy.

Loving in this way means that we seek to be the first to love, always taking the initiative in loving, without waiting to be loved, which would be a merely human attitude.

Furthermore, this love must be expressed not only with words or sentiments; we need to suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice, helping everyone concretely.

Although we direct our love to a man or a woman, we want to love Jesus himself in the person loved, that Jesus who considers done to himself the good or evil we do to our neighbours (see Mt 25: 40-45), as he will tell us at the universal judgement.

Then if more than one of us lives this love, it becomes mutual, the fulfillment of Jesus' commandment which says: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34). Loving one another is – as those who live it out can testify – heaven on earth. It's true, it's really true.

Let's try to live this, my dear young people, when we return to our families or communities, at school or in the office, everywhere, let's all try to love in this way; otherwise, we are not authentic Christians. This kind of love can set off a revolution in the world, in us and around us: it's the Christian revolution.

This love, however, is not easy. Your difficulties or those of others often shatter it, and this is painful. What to do? Remain in that suffering? No. For us Christians suffering has a name: it's the cross. And Jesus told us how to face the crosses we encounter. "If anyone wishes to come after me he must... take up his cross daily and follow me (Lk 9:23). We need to take up our cross, not drag it; we need to wield it like a weapon, to accept it, go ahead and continue loving.

Let's pause here for a moment to understand and cherish in our hearts a wonderful consequence of living mutual love. If we live in this way, something extraordinary takes place: Jesus himself will become spiritually present among us. He promised it: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

Jesus with us! Have you ever thought of it? Have you ever experienced it? Perhaps not. Very well, I can assure you that whoever lives in this way has experienced in his or her heart a very new love, a very new strength, light, joy, courage, ardor, all effects of his presence. And, if he is present, everything is possible!

Dearest young people, I promised at the beginning that I would tell you about the experience of a new people. Very well, this spirituality, the way of living I have been explaining to you has given birth to this reality.

Some years after the start of the Focolare Movement in the Catholic Church, the spirituality of unity aroused the interest and impressed, under one aspect or another, the faithful of different Churches.

The Evangelical Lutherans, for example, in contact with us Catholics, were surprised because not only did we speak of the Gospel, but we also lived it with great intensity. So then they asked us to help them to bring this life into their parishes and communities. The Anglicans of England were attracted by the idea and practice of unity and they also invited us. Likewise, the Orthodox were attracted by the fact that we underline life and love. The members of the Reformed Church, by the presence of Jesus in the midst of small groups. The Methodists liked the spirituality's thrust towards sanctity.

Although they were Christians who belonged to different Churches, they found that they were brothers and sisters in adopting this same lifestyle. Now, as I said before, the faithful of 350 Churches or ecclesial Communities adhere to the Movement. Our life together has always been blessed and

encouraged, besides by the Catholic authorities, also by the authorities of other Churches. The effects of this way of living in the various Churches are identical: people convert to God, new vocations are born, parishes and communities are renewed, families are reconciled, the gap between generations is overcome, and so forth.

With all these brothers and sisters of different Churches, in knowing and loving one another, we also discovered, as if for the first time, what great riches we already had in common: first of all Baptism, then the Old and New Testaments, the dogmas of the first Councils, the Creed, the Greek and Latin Church Fathers, the martyrs and other values as well, like the life of grace, for example, faith, hope, charity, and many other gifts of the Holy Spirit. Whereas before we lived almost as if this patrimony did not exist, now we realize that all this, along with the new spirituality that we share, makes us feel that, in some way, we are already one. In fact, while visible unity still needs to be achieved among our Churches, we feel that we form together “a Christian people” made up of lay people, priests, religious, pastors, bishops.

Furthermore, this spirituality of unity is light for our journey towards full visible communion, because if we want it and if we love one another, Jesus can immediately be present spirituality, through Baptism, between Catholics and Evangelicals, between members of the Reformed Church and Orthodox, between Methodists and Armenians, among everyone. This is a very strong bond which makes us say: no one will ever be able to separate us because Christ himself has bound us all together. He has bound us in what we call the “dialogue of the people”. Indeed, we hope that other forms of dialogue can be potentiated by this “dialogue of the people”, like the dialogue of charity, which was very active between Paul VI and Athenagoras for example; that of prayer, which is especially highlighted during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and theological dialogue. Jesus in the midst of those who love one another can always illuminate.

My dear young people, today’s world demands that we all make every effort to promote universal brotherhood and that each one of us begins to restore the unity of the Church, lacerated for centuries. God wants it and he repeats it and cries it out also through the present-day painful circumstances which he permits.

In the beginning I spoke of the winds of war and the widespread terrorism on our planet. Believe me: it is not entirely the fault of terrorists if we are living times of great emergency. It is not even due to the fact that richer nations have not helped and do not help other nations in great and sometimes dire poverty, fomenting the desire for revenge. Although both of these elements are certainly grave causes for which all of humanity is suffering today, there is something else: it is our fault as well.

As we know there are very many Christians in the world. In fact, if the Catholics alone number one billion, sixty-one million in 2003, how many would we be all together? An enormous number. And yet, as you probably know, right after the attack against the Twin Towers in September 2001, accusations from a world hostile to us described Christians even as “atheists” and “infidels”: a cosmic lie, certainly, but not completely so. In fact, Jesus had said that the world would recognize us as his own and, through us, would recognize him, by our reciprocal love: “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). But as you know we did not maintain united, nor are we now.

What witness of Christ, of his truth and love can we have given and can we give now? Unfortunately, we are no longer like the early Christians who were one heart and one soul and who consequently put all their goods in common!

Well then, what should we do? Perhaps there is nothing left to do but to formulate in our hearts a sincere resolution: to begin loving everyone – as I said – being the first to love, loving concretely, seeing Jesus in each person, and loving one another, so that he will be present among us, and he will certainly be able to repeat the miracle of the early Christians. Jesus said: “I have conquered the world” (Jn 16:33). If we resolve to love, he will give us victory.