

SPIRITUALITY OF UNITY

Being nothing out of love

We continue with this year's theme on Mary the mother of Jesus. Here, **Chiara Lubich** focuses on whether Mary is a help or a hindrance to ecumenical dialogue.

From the 1960s onwards, an increasing number of Christians from a variety of Churches came into contact with the Focolare charism of unity and desired to make it their own. This happened, firstly, with a group of Lutherans in Germany, then with members of the Church of England and then with members of other Churches. Within the Orthodox Church, a profound dialogue developed in 1967 between Patriarch Athenagoras I and Chiara Lubich. Mary was certainly very well known, honoured and loved within the Orthodox Church, but also in many of the Churches of the Reformation. In the way that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was presented to them, in terms of the spirituality of unity lived by members of the Focolare Movement, and thus as a woman totally open to the will of God, she no longer seemed to be an obstacle to dialogue. In the years that followed, admiring the witness and the vibrant commitment of members of the Movement in many Churches to living the spirituality of unity, Chiara often commented on the reasons for the universality of the charism.

Mary – help or hindrance to dialogue?

In an interview, broadcast on Vatican Radio during the 1987 Marian Year, Chiara was asked 'In the area of ecumenism, is the figure of Mary a help or a hindrance on the journey towards full unity of the Churches?' In her response, in line with the fact that the Reformation underlines 'grace alone' and 'faith alone', Chiara presented Mary as a person who, being a 'nothingness of love', allowed her life to be shaped by the Word of God:

'It seems to me that it depends on how Mary is presented. For us, the charism of the Movement helps us present Mary in a certain way, that is, as the first disciple of Christ, the most perfect disciple of Christ, or, for example, present her in the way she lived the Word of God...'

If, on the other hand, Mary is presented in certain traditional ways, which may be fine for us Catholics, but which are not so fine for others, then we find an obstacle. It depends on how she is presented.

What happens to us as an ecumenical movement, which is also a Marian one, is that ministers of other Churches often say that the way we present Mary (and we don't keep quiet about her at all) is acceptable to them.'

June 4, 1987

From a talk to the Ecumenical Assembly of Graz

'In the reconciliation among us Christians, then, we must not forget Mary, who by a Council we share, the Council of Ephesus, was proclaimed Theotókos (Mother of God). Mary, precisely because she is a mother, can do a great deal for unity.

And not only under that title, but also because she is the perfect Christian. As a child, fiancée, spouse, virgin, mother and widow, she can be a model for Christians, who are called to become ever more perfect (see 2 Cor 13: 9-11). Clothed in the Word of God, icon of one who lives the Gospel, she is our model. And in our efforts to



Photo: Citta Nuova

in whom Christ lives, is extremely important for ecumenism...

Mary is a model for us because as the mother of God, she is the one who gave life to Jesus. And our task can be summed up in establishing the presence of Christ in our midst, so that he may unite us as much as possible, as we await full communion. Now Mary, the mother of Jesus, the mother of God, is a model for us who, as Pope Paul VI said, must 'generate Christ in our midst'. So Mary is a model for us all.

work and suffer for unity, she can be an example for us as she stood under the cross and could repeat, more than anyone else: "In my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col 1: 24).

Graz, Austria, June 23, 1997

What does Mary want to say to the Churches?

From a reply to a question asked by a Lutheran pastor during an ecumenical meeting of the Movement

Dearest Chiara, as President of the Work of Mary, what do you think Mary, who is still often considered to be an obstacle to the unity of the Churches, wants to say to Christians from various Churches, now, on the threshold of the third millennium?

'I am certain that Mary has many things to say to all the Churches, not only to the Churches in which she is especially venerated, followed and loved, but also to Churches where her presence is less evident. Mary has many things to say because she is the perfect Christian.

It would be very helpful for ecumenism, for unity among the Churches, to live what Cardinal Bea used to say: "The more Christians from different parts grow closer to Jesus, that is, the more perfect they become, the closer they will grow to one another."

Looking at Mary as the perfect Christian, as the one

And finally, we know that Jesus reconciled all people to God and to one another through suffering. Mary can repeat the words of Paul: "I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." Just think of her at the foot of the cross: in her suffering she really completes the afflictions of Christ.

Suffering is very important in this life... It is very important because it is the prime matter, the fuel of unity, and so if we offer our sacrifices, our penances and our efforts to live what is required of us as Christians, then we are imitating Mary also in being like her, that is, people who complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

Therefore, we see all these things in Mary: the perfect Christian, the model, the living Word of God. Jesus was the incarnate Word, she was the Word lived out. Mary brings Christ in our midst and so she can be our model. She alone is capable of bringing Christ into the world and, learning from her, we can bring him spiritually among us. In addition, she completes what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Without suffering, nothing can be accomplished on earth, especially in the religious field. So this is what I think about the contribution that Mary can give.'

Castel Gandolfo, Italy, April 4, 1997

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Extracts from **Mary, flower of humanity** by Chiara Lubich.
Published by New City (2017)