

Essential Writings

Supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation
... *exploring the creative interface between science and religion*

Chiara Lubich

Essential Writings

Spirituality • Dialogue • Culture

Foreword by
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New City Press
Hyde Park, NY

Published in the United States by New City Press
202 Comforter Blvd., Hyde Park, NY 12538
www.newcitypress.com
©2007 New City Press, New York and New City, London (English translation)

Translated by Bob Cummings, Jerry Hearne, Thomas Masters, Eugene Selzer and Callan Slipper
(revised and edited by Thomas Masters and Callan Slipper) from the original Italian
La dottrina spirituale
©2006, Città Nuova Editrice, Rome, Italy

Cover design by Durvanorte Correia

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Lubich, Chiara, 1920-
[Dottrina spirituale. English]
Essential writings : spirituality dialogue culture / Chiara Lubich ; compiled by Michel
Vandeleene ; foreword by William Keeler.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13 : 978-1-56548-258-6 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN-13 : 978-1-56548-259-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Spirituality-- Meditations. I. Vandeleene, Michel. II. Title.
BV4501.3.L7913 2007
248.4'82--dc22 2006031779

1st printing: January 2007
3rd printing: February 2015

Printed in the United States of America

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To the Readers

Se in qualche valore hanno le parole
di questo libro, è da attribuirsi al carisma
che la Santa Spirito ha voluto affidarmi:
un dono dello Spirito che, come a i clericali
all'umanità, è destinato di sua natura a tutti
valore che nel mondo lo vogliono accogliere.

Mi auguro che qualche traccetta della
sua luce e qualche traccetta nell'animo vero,
che da lui promana, possa dar nuova spinta
a quanti ne sono già stati beneficiati; e toccare,
illuminare, spingere, confortare, condurre a
mette degne uomini e donne del nostro
tempo, di ogni età, popolo, fede e cultura.

Chiara Lubich

If my words in this book have any value, it is to be attributed to the charism that the goodness of God wished to entrust to me: a gift of the Spirit which by its nature, as other similar gifts poured out on the human race, is meant to be given to everyone in the world who wishes to receive it.

I hope that some glimmer of his light and some gleam of the true love issuing from him may give a new impetus to those who have already received its benefits, and touch, illuminate, spur on, comfort, guide to noble goals men and women of our times, of every age, race, faith, and culture.

Chiara Lubich

Foreword

I had just been called by Pope John Paul II to shepherd the Diocese of Harrisburg, PA, and was looking and praying for a way in which to encourage the laity of my new diocese to live more fully the life of Jesus. At an ecumenical dialogue meeting I shared my concern with another priest, a professor of theology, who without hesitation recommended that I contact the Focolare Movement. As if in answer to that prayer, I soon met two women from the Movement who by chance had stopped by the sacristy after Mass to greet me. A week later, as I waited to be received by the Holy Father in Rome, another member of the Movement introduced himself. He told me the story of Chiara Lubich and her first companions, and of the birth of the Focolare in Trent, Italy, amidst the death and destruction of the Second World War.

During the more than twenty years since my providential introduction to the Focolare, the joyful, helpful, thoughtful presence of members of the Movement has been a constant support for me, for the Church, and for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Wherever I have gone, in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, the Americas, I have found members of the Focolare, living what I knew my own people needed when I first became a bishop — the life of Jesus here in today's world. What the Holy Spirit, through Chiara and those who gathered around her, launched out of the fierce days of 1943 has borne amazing fruit.

In these pages, through documents from the earliest days of the Movement up to the present, Chiara shares her discovery of God who is Love and what that means for the life of the Christian community in the present age. They present a vision of the gospel message illuminated by the spirituality of unity, a new way of living that is faithful to the tradition of the Church, yet strikingly contemporary. Through her own insights and through the experience of the Focolare community, she demonstrates how to enter into respectful, fruitful dialogue within the Catholic Church, with all who share the Christian heritage, with the faithful of the major world religions, with those who live according to convictions not based in religion. A new culture is being born in which individuals of every age, gender, nationality, faith, economic condition, political orientation, school of thought, without compromising their principles, deepen their personal commitment to a more united world.

Cardinal William Keeler
Archbishop of Baltimore

Introduction

I.

The Spirituality of Unity in the Christian Vocation

Christian mysticism

A person God chooses for one of his projects is like the brush in an artist's hand or the pen between a poet's fingers. This image, in various forms, often appears in the sayings of the mystics. Indeed it expresses well, in its utter simplicity, what mystics clearly see in their relationships with the One to whom they have dedicated their existence. It expresses their awareness of their role in all that flows from their actions: without hesitation they recognize that its inspiration and its author lie elsewhere. The image of brush or pen, at first glance, could seem to downgrade human creativity's contribution. But the painter needs a brush to paint and the poet needs a pen to write. And the grace of God too, as Augustine teaches, can do nothing without a person's free participation. The theology of the Eastern Church even speaks of synergy, of something done by both partners, where the initiative belongs to God, but nothing happens in the human world without us making a clear choice and opening ourselves to God.

For these reasons Mary's "let it be done" to the angel is the model for every kind of divine activity in the world and every genuine cooperation in it by a creature. Mary, St. Thomas Aquinas writes, said her yes in the name of the whole human race, and upon her human yes depends the greatest and most amazing thing God has ever done: the incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ. So Mary's yes in some way is the shape of every other yes said to God, whether said before or after Jesus' birth, unfolding in time and space the full meaning and impact of the Word's coming among humankind.

Synergy therefore, where the human creature, following God for the good of all, experiences the meaning and the goal of his or her freedom and personal identity, in a paradoxical, immediate, life-filled combination of receptivity and activity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the philosopher Henri Bergson tried to describe the new and unexpected

personality of the mystic who by grace, and in complete though hard-won freedom, enters into transformative union:

Now it is God who is acting through the soul, in the soul; the union is total, therefore final ... for the soul there is a superabundance of life. There is a boundless impetus. There is an irresistible impulse which hurls it into vast enterprises. A calm exaltation of all its faculties makes it see things on a vast scale only, and, in spite of its own weakness, produces only what can be mightily wrought. Above all, it sees things simply, and this simplicity, which is equally striking in the words it uses and the conduct it follows, guides it through complications which it apparently does not even perceive. An innate knowledge, or rather an acquired ignorance, suggests to it straight-away the step to be taken, the decisive act, the unanswerable word. Yet effort remains indispensable, endurance and perseverance likewise. But they come of themselves, they develop of their own accord, in a soul acting and acted upon, whose liberty coincides with the divine activity.¹

Cases like those described by Bergson certainly contain a special grace coupled with a specific mission to fulfill. Still, in its essence Christian mysticism is simply the achievement — in the “already” but “not yet” of history — of the vocation every Christian is called to in faith and reaches through charity. Through our incorporation in Christ by the Holy Spirit in baptism, as Christians we are brought to perfection through Christ’s personal self-communication in the Eucharist. The surprising exclamation of the apostle Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:19-20), explains the meaning of Christian existence both as gift and calling to identification with Christ, where, as a member of Christ’s Mystical Body, each of us becomes his or her true self.

The light and truth of unity

This substantial and well thought-out selection of Chiara Lubich’s writings gives us an opportunity to encounter this experience, highly relevant today. While what is presented here is strikingly original, all the elements of a genuine and powerful mysticism can be recognized, a mysticism with an effective and understandable way of becoming incarnate in our times. Indeed, these pages echo with the Word of Christ who is the same “yesterday, today and forever.” Still, this same Word is spoken, welcomed and offered with an accent that makes it surprisingly up-to-date.

As the Second Vatican Council said: “God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads into all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them.”² God speaks to the Church today too, and through it to the whole human race. This is because God wants the Church to be open to everyone and to be the home of all. And today humanity has entered into a new and dramatic era of its history: the era of the global village inviting us all to become a single family. So it is not by chance that the specific word of Jesus that Chiara Lubich feels called to relive and witness to is: “May they all be one” (Jn 17:21). It is one word among the many said by Christ, but it is at the heart of his message and his life — it is the dream of the Father, the most solemn prayer of the Son made flesh, the crucial yearning at the core of each human being, and the great sign of our times.

This particular word did not overwhelm Chiara in a dazzling vision. Her discovery came rather from reading the Gospel in the darkness of an air raid shelter, in the northern Italian city of Trent, accompanied by the fury of the bombs during the Second World War. It was, as she says, as if the words of chapter seventeen of John’s gospel were lit up from within. Here, before the hour of his passion and death, Jesus turns to the Father. He utters mysterious words full of meaning that could not be easily understood by a woman just twenty years old, even though providentially it seems she had been made ready for them.

“Look,” she wrote in a letter at the beginning of the 1940s, “I am a soul passing through this world. I have seen many beautiful and good things and I have always been attracted only by them. One day (one indescribable day) I saw a light. It appeared to me as more beautiful than the other beautiful things, and I followed it. I realized it was the Truth.” These words contain, perhaps, the secret of Chiara’s life: sincere, full of love, unclouded by any other agenda, an openness to the light of God made known in the truth, goodness and beauty of the world round about her. One day this was revealed to her eyes, as if completely new, in the most beautiful of the children of Adam, in Jesus who said of himself: “I am the truth” (Jn 14:6). It was a light not only concentrated in him, but shining out from him, illuminating other persons and things, events and situations. It launched Chiara and those who immediately followed her, all fascinated by the light, on a divine adventure where they discovered the golden thread that, through and in Jesus, binds everyone and everything into one. This light is the love of God; indeed, it is God himself who is Love and who has shown himself as Love by giving to us what is most dear to him and most his, his only begotten Son.

The secret — Jesus crucified and forsaken

Believing in this love is the beginning and, at the same time, the high point of Christian faith as Chiara Lubich rediscovered it. For her, as for the New Testament and the undivided tradition of the Church, the light and the love of the Father have a name and a face: Jesus crucified. From the very first steps of her spiritual adventure, she had an attitude of radical openness, unburdened by human expectations, in the face of her experience of God's light.

So Chiara was guided to discover and to choose, among the sufferings of Jesus, the one most hidden and interior, yet the deepest and most tragic. That is, the extreme aloneness and meaninglessness of the cross, of being forsaken by that Father-God he still knows with absolute certainty to be Love. It is the cry of the ninth hour: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46) which shows the extremes Christ's love urged him to go through for our sake. Chiara does not doubt or hesitate: if Jesus has loved us this much, feeling separation from God in order to make himself our neighbor and to reunite us to the Father, then this cry, this face of Jesus as the Forsaken One will be the one Ideal of her life.

The word "May they all be one" then finds the secret of its fulfillment in the cry of forsakenness. Only those who, with and in Jesus, are ready to live in the faith of love that conquers the huge and often humanly impossible trial of forsakenness, in the thousands of forms it takes in human existence — only these can make this word their life's ideal. Thanks to Jesus forsaken, recognized and welcomed as the one good, unity is no longer a utopia: it becomes history, humanity's real history. This is the originating core and guiding principle of these essential writings. Chiara Lubich's spirituality springs from the free, exclusive choice of Jesus forsaken that allows Jesus himself to pour into her heart those streams of living water and light which, as the Word of the Father made man, he brings down from heaven to earth to communicate in their fullness to all.

Indeed, in its early years the story of Chiara Lubich and her work goes through a period of intense illumination. In 1949, as Chiara puts it, "It seemed that God wanted to give us an intuition of some of his plans for our Movement. We also understood better many truths of the faith, particularly who Jesus forsaken was for humanity and for creation — he who recapitulated all things in himself."³ It was a founding moment, one with clear parallels in the story of the great charisms, the great spiritual Movements that have arisen throughout the centuries of Christ's Church.

Going to God together: the Trinity and mutual love

One fact, however, is completely original, at least in the degree of its intensity and in its specific fruits: in keeping with the unity Christ wills — the unity Chiara Lubich and her Movement feel called to witness to and promote in the world — this experience is radically a shared one. It is about going to God together, and Christians are called in Christ to be “one heart and one soul,” a teaching that Jesus, like a divine sculptor, deeply and permanently etched on Chiara’s soul. We need not avoid our neighbors to stay in God’s presence. We have to love them as ourselves, recognizing in them the face of Christ, especially in the poor, the lonely, those who suffer in any way at all: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). This must be done to carry out the will of the Father. When love becomes mutual in Christ to the point of reaching, through Jesus forsaken, the real unity which we celebrate sacramentally in the Eucharist, we enter with our brother or sister into the place Jesus has brought us. That is, the kingdom of God which is the bosom of the Father, where everything is love and communion, light and joy, and each thing belongs to all: “all that is mine is yours” (see Jn 17:10).

Here is what’s new about Christianity, what sums it up: the revelation of God as the Trinity of Love, the inexpressible and inexhaustible communication of Self to Self and to creation, and thus the vocation of human creatures to be, each on his or her own and all together, “sons in the Son.” The truth, novelty and beauty of what Chiara Lubich teaches about spirituality consists — through the breath of the Holy Spirit — in helping to bring about today the light and grace of the unity Christ has realized in human history. So it is a teaching both utterly traditional and prophetically creative. Like a branch grafted onto the ancient trunk of the Church’s experience and doctrine, helping it flower anew, it is traditional, and because of its original perspective on the once-and-for-all revelation of Christ, it is creative.

As already suggested, Jesus forsaken himself is both traditional and creative, especially when recognized and welcomed for who he is: the revelation of love and so, the key to unity. This “glance at the core of faith,” as Hans Urs von Balthasar would say, reshapes Christian life and truth from top to bottom. Archbishop G. B. Montini, later Pope Paul VI, recognized this in the 1950s when Chiara Lubich presented her gospel-based intuition to him. The “new” element (though ancient as the gospel itself) of this spirituality is indeed the existential understanding, in the light of Jesus forsaken, of the Trinitarian love between the Father and the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

And this Trinitarian love is the pattern and dynamic thrust of human existence. This new element is lived out in all of humanity's expressions — ecclesial, social, cultural — and at every level of human life — personal, communal, social — with all the necessary consequences. It is a love that makes the presence and action of the risen Christ in history something we can experience. Indeed he promised: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). But we have to do our part to set free his presence into the world: we must live united in his name (see Mt 18:20), putting into practice that will of his that sums up all others: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). This is how he comes to dwell among us as Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Balancing contemplation and action

And this Trinitarian love is the basis for the unity in distinction between the religious and the secular aspect, between the ecclesial and the social aspect of the Movement founded by Chiara Lubich. In other words, it is the dynamic balance between contemplation and action. Not by chance does one of Chiara's most famous passages begin by speaking of "the great attraction of modern times," which she deftly describes as "to penetrate to the highest contemplation while mingling with everyone, one person alongside others." The pages of this collection fully document the successful synthesis of these two essential and complementary dimensions of the Christian spirit.

This, it could be said, is common to every true spirituality, even if the dominant feature in one spirituality is contemplation and in another is action. But Chiara has realized the centrality of Jesus forsaken as the key not only to union with God but also to unity with her brothers and sisters. So she has identified the Archimedean point that unites, without confusion, the vertical, divine nature with the horizontal, human nature both of the experience of Christ and of those who, with serious commitment, join the community of his followers. This perspective allows us to speak of a mysticism for the dawn of the third millennium, a mysticism that also brings us back to the most genuine mysticism at the origins of Christianity. That is, the mysticism of Jesus and Mary, where vertical union with God was lived among those who were their brothers and sisters, and with them, in the service of all people in the everyday affairs of life.

The Christian of the future, as Karl Rahner pointed out a few decades ago, will either be a mystic, one who lives the experience of God in the world, or he

or she will simply not exist. It is not hard to see how and why — without any compromise or watering down — a spirituality like the one that comes from Chiara Lubich's charism is adapted to every human condition and to every kind of vocation in the Church and in society. Perhaps this is why a layperson, a woman, was chosen to be its bearer. And not by chance did Chiara Lubich's spirituality and her Movement from the very beginning, even before the Second Vatican Council, draw ever-greater numbers of men and women, priests and bishops, men and women religious from countless spiritual families, the married and the unmarried, young people of all ages and older people, from every nation on earth. It has produced a modern school of holiness open to all. And this holiness is a holiness of the people summed up in faithfulness to love as the essence of the gospel and, in this love, to one's own vocation as the fulfillment of God's specific will for each person. All this takes place in a communion lived with everyone, going beyond every kind of diversity based on culture, social class, or walk of life, where in fact these differences are seen as gifts to be offered and put in common with all that others bring with them.

Open to dialogue with everyone

In addition, the gospel imperative, "May they all be one," combined with passion for the disfigured face of Jesus forsaken meant that the dynamism of this charism could not stay locked inside the Roman Catholic Church. And, in fact, in harmony with the ecumenical movement, the spirituality of unity soon spread among Orthodox, Lutherans, Reformed, Anglicans ... still today it is moving to recall the spontaneous and especially intense sympathy between Chiara Lubich and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople. He, as in their various ways did many other leading figures among the Churches, recognized in Chiara's spirituality the common and fertile ground of the gospel of love. And living the gospel with one's gaze fixed on the crucified Christ — who was ready to give everything to re-establish unity between the Father and his brothers and sisters — can, as this man, a Father of the Church in our times, prophetically loved to say, speed up "the hour of the one chalice."

In the last few decades, the meeting with the great religious traditions of humanity and with some of their most important leaders has been even more unexpected, and perhaps more fascinating. In these encounters, Chiara Lubich has acted as an ambassador of peace, of dialogue and of brotherhood to the whole world: from Jerusalem to Tokyo, from Chiang Mai in the north of Thailand to the Malcolm Shabazz Mosque in Harlem, from meetings with

Hinduism to contacts with Islam. What opens up surprisingly new and apparently unbridgeable ways is always the same spirit that urges us to look at Jesus forsaken who, according to the teaching of Paul, knew how to strip himself of every richness (see Phil 2:7) so as to make himself one with all (see 1 Cor 9:22). Those who model their existence on Jesus forsaken become in him living witnesses — first in being and then through words — of what most specifically belongs to the gospel. That is, they give witness to the love that is able to become the other, so that the other too may welcome freely the same precious gift Christ's disciples know they have received freely and bear in earthen vessels. Then, when the other's time comes, the same gift may be given to whoever wants to receive it.

Chiara Lubich's spirituality seems to have been developed precisely for energizing and fleshing out that "aggiornamento" of the Church's life required by the current era of human history, and which John XXIII spoke of when he called the Second Vatican Council. For the first time as Bishop of Rome, in 1984 John Paul II met the Focolare Movement at its center at Rocca di Papa in the hills near Rome. Having heard there a summary of the Movement's spirit, structure and activities, it is not surprising that he recognized in it, in miniature, the features of the Church as laid out by the Council. That Church is not on the defensive, enclosed by a siege mentality. Rather, aware of its identity and mission as "a sign and instrument of unity" for the whole world, it is open to dialogue with everyone, in joyful and credible witness to the crucified and risen Christ. It is a Church committed, as *Novo Millennio Ineunte* desires, to living the spirituality of communion before everything else.

Foundations for a cultural paradigm shift

What Chiara Lubich teaches gives witness to a paradigm shift in the history of Christian spirituality, by going from the primacy of the individual to a balance between persons and communion — which is in line with the aspirations of Vatican II and our needs today. In addition, moreover, it is a spirituality rooted in the mysticism of Jesus, true God and true Man, living again today through the unity of those who belong to him. So it lays down the kind of foundations needed for a significant cultural paradigm shift. In a troubled and sometimes even tragic way our era demands such a shift with some urgency and, in different and even contradictory forms, we can begin to grasp its outlines.

Such an impact is not new in the history of Christian spirituality. A new charism generates from within itself a cultural style shaping the character of those aspects of human and social life in which it is called to participate. We've only to think of the effects of Benedict of Nursia's "pray and work" and the birth of Europe, of Francis of Assisi's ideal of "Lady Poverty" and the flowering of medieval Christianity, or of Ignatius of Loyola's "for the greater glory of God" and the emergence of the modern era. Theology, philosophy, social, economic and political organization, the arts and even the scientific study of nature have all been influenced, at times even profoundly marked by the mystical inspiration of these great saints.

This is not an overly bold suggestion, because the charism of unity's original view of Christian revelation and the vision of the world it unfolds cannot but cast its own light on all these levels of human existence. The third part of this anthology shows this. It presents the first intuitions derived from the charism, already put into practice in their respective fields, in various areas of human study and action. Indeed for some years now a group (the Abba School) of academics and scholars competent in a variety of disciplines have gathered around Chiara Lubich with the idea of making explicit what could be called the cultural potential of the spirituality of Jesus forsaken and of unity. The Abba School's methodology and its objective are ambitious, almost risky. In our time, modernity is uncovering the crisis of the subject and accompanying that, the fragmentation of knowledge. At the same time, there is an explosion of all the complexities of multiculturalism together with the unrelenting emergence of globalization with its opportunities and dangers.

The Abba School seeks to rediscover the center that enlightens and gives truth, trying not to suffocate it in some kind of over-simplified uniformity yet at the same time not to get lost in a relativizing multiplicity of perspectives. What the School seeks is a celebration of genuine diversity gathered into the One that is Three because it is Love. The shadow of the absence of God weighs upon so many parts of contemporary culture. In the light of Jesus forsaken, who Chiara Lubich unhesitatingly recognizes as "the God of our times," even this reality can be interpreted and illuminated as that "collective dark night of an era." This "collective dark night" prepares the dawn of a new civilization of love where the principal actors are all the members of the whole human family in its multifaceted expressions and richness.

The Work of Mary

Among all that could be said, I think we should remember one thing. The Movement that has arisen from the charism of unity is known everywhere as the Focolare Movement. But according to the Roman Catholic Church its official name is the Work of Mary. Its General Statutes explain this in these words: “The Work of Mary bears this name because its characteristic spirituality, its ecclesial form, the variety of which it is composed, its universal expansion, its relationships of collaboration and friendship with Christians of different Churches and ecclesial communities, with persons of various faiths and of goodwill, and its lay and female presidency, demonstrate the particular link it has with Mary most holy, mother of Christ and of each human being, of whom it would like, insofar as it is possible, to be a presence on the earth and almost a continuation.” So the Work of Mary is another way of speaking of Mary at work in the Church and among humanity today.

Here, perhaps, we should look for the simplest and deepest inspiration for a charism so rich, new and universal. It is a presence of Mary. We can recognize in it what von Balthasar first described as the “Marian profile” of the Church, where he said it is as fundamental and definitive for Christianity as the apostolic and Petrine profile, if not indeed more so.⁴ Mary, as I mentioned at the beginning of my few words, gave Jesus to the world. For this reason she formed a background for him so that, in a unique way, he could shine his light upon us and could carry out the greatest revolution of all time, which Mary sang prophetically in her Magnificat. Chiara follows the same way, so that today Jesus can continue and bring to fulfillment his work, “May they all be one.”

Piero Coda, Professor of Fundamental Theology,
Lateran Pontifical University, Rome

II. The Spirituality of Unity in Contemporary Thought and Culture

A charism

It's difficult to find answers concerning our present age — What's going forward? What are the underlying dynamisms for development? What's positive, what's negative? In recent decades, the world has been buffeted between competing ideologies: Marxism vs. capitalism, collectivism vs. individualism, atheism vs. a thirst for anything spiritual. From a philosophical-cultural perspective, since the end of the 18th century a huge sweep of seemingly contradictory systems of thought has dominated the modern period. Yet Professor David Walsh of The Catholic University of America has written that — in and through their various disagreements — a central theme runs from Kant through Hegel, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Lévinas: how the meaning of existence cannot be expressed, but must in the first place be lived.⁵

Chiara Lubich answers the deepest questions of our era by speaking of a life that gives meaning and generates doctrine. As a young woman in search of truth, she set out to study philosophy. Because of the disruption of World War II, however, her university studies ceased. In their place, her discovery of the gospel opened up a new life and a new community, and with it a new lived wisdom that soon cast its light on all of existence, and not just in the religious sense.

She is very conscious that what has emerged around her over the past 60 years is not the achievement of an individual. Her spirituality and the worldwide movement that she leads come from a charism. And this is important. The Second Vatican Council reminded us how the Holy Spirit sends charisms to guide and help the Church and humanity along the journey of history. Theologians such as Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Yves Congar as well as Jürgen Moltmann have written on this subject. Charisms are gifts of the Spirit of the risen Christ that light up particular points of God's will, opening new windows onto the gospel appropriate for the needs of each new era.

Born from a charism as a revolution in the way of thinking and acting, the Focolare Movement centers its life and activity on Jesus' prayer for unity: "May they all be one" (Jn 17:21). Its window onto the gospel is "unity." Pope John Paul II often affectionately called the Movement a "people," a

new people, born from the gospel, living from the perspective of unity modeled on the Trinity. By sharing the new “spirituality of unity,” Chiara Lubich and her “people” around the globe have sought to promote and spread a culture of interdependence and universal brotherhood and so offer their contribution to the human family.

Not just a religious phenomenon

We tend to think that the gospel only concerns bringing about the Kingdom of God in a religious sense. But Chiara Lubich’s experience through the Movement has been that inundations of light can be projected onto many different aspects of contemporary culture and on all levels of human endeavor, from the home and family to the government and economy, from the worlds of art or sport to the encounter between religions and ethnic groups, from media and science to psychology and law. By way of explanation she comments: “Certainly it is not the historical Jesus or Jesus as Head of the Mystical Body who resolves all problems. This is done by Jesus-us, Jesus-me, Jesus-you.... It is Jesus in human beings, in each particular human being, when his grace is in them, who builds a bridge, opens the road. Jesus is the true, deepest personality of each individual.”⁶

But there is something more. For Chiara it is not simply individuals that make a difference. Rather it is by being “one heart and soul” that we can truly be at the service of humanity (see Acts 2:32). It is in being united with one another in the name of Jesus Christ that we are more effective, working together in his light (see Mt 18:20): “It is the incarnation that continues, a full incarnation that involves all of the Jesuses of the Mystical Body of Christ.”⁷

For Chiara, the new life she has discovered, lived and communicated is communitarian, a life based on a mutual love that “generates” the presence of the Risen Jesus among two or three gathered in his name in diverse social, cultural and ecclesial contexts. In this way the “one heart and soul” expands to the benefit of all. She has recovered a vital dynamic in Christian life that has been obscured, one that we can see expressed clearly in the second century Letter to Diognetus:

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humankind either by country, speech, or customs; the fact is, they nowhere settle in cities of their own; they use no peculiar language; they cultivate no eccentric mode of life.... In a word: what the soul is in the body, that the Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body, and the

Christians throughout the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but is not part and parcel of the body, so Christians dwell in the world, but are not part and parcel of the world. Itself invisible, the soul is kept shut up in the visible body; so Christians are known as such in the world, but their religion remains invisible.⁸

This new communitarian spirituality is clearly not the monopoly of the Focolare Movement. Fruit of a charism, a gift of God, it has a universal destination. As Warith Deen Mohammed, the renowned Muslim leader and initiator of the Mosque Cares project has commented:

(Chiara Lubich) is a gift from God, to us, to help this world heal itself and come together so we can survive.... So I see her as a person that God has created Himself. She is not even a creation of the Catholic Church, in my opinion. She is a creation of God. God has made her what she is, and God has chosen her for the work that she is doing.⁹

Our search for ultimate meaning in Jesus' quest

Her address at Mexico City on the conferral of an honorary doctorate in philosophy¹⁰ makes it clear that Chiara Lubich effortlessly joins in the modern philosophical and cultural debates and yet points beyond them with reflections on existence that are both profound and accessible.

On the one hand the theme of unity as the ultimate meaning of existence shines through. Chiara Lubich's Focolare Movement is to be understood within history's existential march toward the unity of the entire human family. But more than any other thinker of our time, Chiara has indicated how the contemporary quest for ultimate meaning, which in many thinkers has become stalled, can in fact be understood as Jesus' quest too. In his forsakenness at the culminating moment of his life, Jesus also experienced the apparent cul-de-sac of modern thought. And yet, through love, he showed the way to get beyond that failure. On this basis, the very negation that seems to be the end of philosophy, of art, of culture has for Chiara been transformed — through her spiritual courage to live through it beyond its negation — into a self-negation in the service of love. Our era displays features of what, alluding to John of the Cross, Pope John Paul II called an "epochal dark night" of culture that has fallen over humanity. Chiara offers Jesus as the way toward healing that cultural dark night. For her, Jesus forsaken is the "God for our times" who draws us into the inner self-negation-out-of-love of the Trinity that explains existence.

New language for a new meaning

While people of all walks of life and of both religious and non-religious convictions have found new meaning in Chiara Lubich's life and writings, it is especially Christians of all Churches who have attested to the vital impact of the Focolare charism. In 2002, Dr. Konrad Raiser, then Secretary-General of the World Council of Churches, highlighted Chiara's "vital contribution to the ecumenical movement."¹¹

The late renowned Carmelite and leading expert in spirituality, Jesus Castellano Cervera of the Teresianum University in Rome affirmed:

The name of Chiara Lubich has entered the history of spirituality of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as one of the most prestigious and listened-to spiritual teachers. This is due to her genuine Gospel inspiration as well as the human and cultural universality that characterizes her teaching and work.... It can be affirmed that Chiara Lubich's spiritual doctrine is one of Christian spirituality's all time greatest highpoints and syntheses.... This might seem an excessive statement but it is possible to foresee the day that historians of spirituality and mysticism, theologians and teachers, will recognize in her an eminent witness of the spirituality of the whole Christian era and a person in whom the spiritual ways that have emerged along the course of history converge and harmonize, enriching each other and being redirected toward a luminous future.¹²

The writings contained in this volume reflect Chiara Lubich's multifaceted personality, movement and spirituality. Such has been the depth and novelty of her experience that, in ways reminiscent of Nietzsche and others, we find in Chiara a new language to communicate a new meaning discovered in the book of light and love, unity and suffering that God has been writing throughout her life.

Wallace Stevens, the great mid-century American poet, wrote:

The tragedy, however, may have begun,
Again, in the imagination's new beginning,
In the yes of the realist spoken because he must
Say yes, spoken because under every no
Lay a passion for yes that had never been broken.¹³

In many ways, this volume leads us into Chiara Lubich's yes spoken in the face of every no.

Brendan Purcell, University College, Dublin
Brendan Leahy, Professor of Systematic Philosophy,
St. Patrick's College, Maynooth
Thomas Norris, International Theological Commission

Editors' Preface

Translating and editing these “essential writings” of Chiara Lubich has deepened our respect not only for her intellectual and spiritual depth, but also for her power, skill, and elegance as a writer. Trying to express her in English has been a challenge! But we have attempted as far as we are able, by every word chosen, every punctuation mark placed, every sentence crafted, every passage arranged, to take readers as close to her as possible. Chiara writes with a distinctive voice and we have tried to preserve that. Of course, every translation fails to some extent, but we have sought to overcome the various obstacles in such a way that the reader may enter into something of the same conceptual and spiritual space accessible to the Italian reader.

Perhaps a little of the excitement of the spiritual discovery made by Chiara, something of its simplicity, its delicacy yet its overwhelming nature, can be captured even in translation. It opens up a world in which faith is about living and living is focused on the yearning that will never be satisfied until Jesus' prayer, his last will and testament, is fulfilled: “May they all be one.”

The texts in this volume have been selected and arranged with a view to entering this world. They lay bare the cornerstones of her work. Many of them are standard or, as it were, classic expositions of Chiara's vision. These texts will serve readers for years to come. In the first place they are useful for those who wish to meditate upon Chiara's spirituality to draw upon it for their lives, but scholars will also find them useful to understand more clearly the distinctive contribution of her spirituality both in itself and in its implications in practically every aspect of human activity and culture.

With this in mind, it may be good to offer readers some notions to help find their bearings in the sea of material.

Organization of this book

The book is in three parts, each an anthology of texts from the many literary genres that Chiara has used. This variety is unified in each section by the basic purpose of the part. Overall the three parts give a comprehensive picture.

The first part, “Mysticism for the Third Millennium,” presents both the origins and the originality of the spirituality of unity. Consequently it unveils the spirituality’s fundamental points: its focus on unity, the love for Jesus crucified and forsaken, its communitarian nature, its relationship to other traditions of spirituality in the Church, the place of prominence that Mary holds in it. It indicates the characteristic sense of family, of profound mutual belonging, that supports this unprecedented way of devoting one’s life to God, particularly in the new form of vocation found within the Movement born from the spirituality — the “fourth way,” the Focolare.

The purpose of the second part, “A New Look at Faith,” is to consider what the spirituality means for the core experiences common to all Christians. It shows the Christian faith in a fresh light. Beginning from the realization at the root of everything else, that God is Love, it outlines the vocation of every person to be love. Certain elements of Christian experience stand out in a life of love centered on unity — among them the will of God, mutual love, Jesus crucified and forsaken, the presence of God among his people, the words of life contained in Scripture, the Eucharist, Mary, the Holy Spirit. Taken together as a way of living, these elements generate a current of culture for the world today.

Part Three, “Reflections of Light upon the World,” draws out the implications of this culture. These are foundational documents, often with something of a programmatic nature. Chiara demonstrates how to generate constructive dialogue, offering ways of bringing about an alternative approach based on the gospel. Her range is enormous. She looks at families, women, and young people, theology, philosophy, education, psychology, politics, economics, communications, and art. And she also draws the consequences of her approach for the search for Christian unity and for relations with members of other religions and with people whose convictions are not based in religion.

How to use this book

Essential Writings is comprehensive in the sweep of time it covers, from 1943 to the present, as well as in the variety of genres it contains. A single section may encompass letters or meditations originally intended for an intimate audience as well as speeches addressed to huge throngs, spiritual poems as well as transcripts of question and answer sessions with Chiara herself, aphorisms as well as academic lectures. Taken together, they reflect Chiara’s literary output, which to this point has been published separately or not at all. Different readers may approach it in different ways.

- Those unfamiliar with Chiara or with the Focolare Movement may wish to begin by reading the first section in each of the three parts. These serve to orient readers toward the deeper exploration of spirituality, dialogue and culture, that each part elaborates.
- Those who already know Chiara and the spirituality of unity will find familiar passages (albeit in a fresh, often revised translation) as well as unfamiliar texts that will deepen their understanding and appreciation. Many passages have never appeared before in English translation.
- By using the table of contents and the index, those who seek material for spiritual reading or meditation can follow themes that run through all three sections of the anthology, themes that touch on the central realities and mysteries of Christian life.
- Scholars will find a wealth of primary sources that give an in-depth presentation of Chiara, the spirituality of unity, and the Focolare Movement, as well as a chronology of important dates in the life of Chiara and the Focolare Movement, a thumbnail sketch of the Movement's size and its various sections, a comprehensive index, and bibliographies of additional sources published in English and in other languages.

Concerning the sources and style

This volume contains a number of previously published passages, and the original sources are cited in endnotes. Chiara subsequently has revised some of these selections, and they are indicated as “revised” in the endnotes. Those published for the first time in this anthology are identified as such in the brief explanatory note that precedes them.

At various points the original Italian texts use italic type and capitalization of some terms for emphasis. We have retained those features in the English translation. Another feature of the original style is the occasional use of scriptural passages that are punctuated as quotations, yet actually are paraphrases of biblical matter. We indicate these periphrastic quotations in the parenthetical citation with the notation “see”; for example, on page 67 there is the citation (see Is 62:4). With few exceptions, we have used the New Revised Standard Version for biblical citations. When the wording of a scriptural passage from NRSV did not fit the author's tone or intention we have indicated with an abbreviation in the citation that another translation has been used. For other sources cited in the original text, such as papal documents, passages from the Fathers of the Church, or from other spiritual writers, we have used published English translations. In a few cases it was necessary that we make our own as indicated in the introduction to the Notes, page 401.

Chiara uses few explanatory footnotes, and where she does we have indicated them with “author” in parenthesis following the note. We have supplied other footnotes where it was necessary to explain terms strange to readers not conversant with the Focolare lexicon, to put certain statements into their historical context, to identify historical figures unknown in an English-speaking cultural context, or to address shades of meaning that the English translation could not capture.

We acknowledge the generous help of the Templeton Foundation, which has underwritten the production of the English version of *Essential Writings*. We also wish to recognize the contributions of Michel Vandeleene, who undertook painstaking and careful work as the general editor of this volume and of the original Italian version; Giovanni d’Alessandro of Città Nuova, Rome; Luisa Del Zanna of the international headquarters of the Work of Mary; Carla Cotignoli of the Focolare Information Office; Bob Cummings, Jerry Hearne, and Eugene Selzer, who did the preliminary translations; Enzo Fondi, Giorgio Marchetti, Piero Coda, Brendan Leahy, Thomas Norris and Brendan Purcell; the staff of New City Press, New York and New City, London; and the many, many others who have lent their assistance in preparing this edition.

Thomas Masters and Callan Slipper, editors

Part One

Mysticism for the Third Millennium

Key texts of the spirituality of unity

The Beginnings

A discourse at the Council Chambers of Bologna, 22 September 1997, on the occasion of her receiving the Turruta d'Argento Award. In this previously unpublished address, Chiara Lubich describes the principal stages of her story, which is linked with the birth and development of the Focolare Movement.

The welcome I received, although directed to me, was meant in a special way, I believe, for what I represent, the Focolare Movement, a religious and social movement present in 182 nations, practically everywhere in the world.

It is most widespread in the Catholic Church, but is also found in 300 other churches and ecclesial communities and among the faithful of many other religions, as well as people of goodwill who do not relate their lives directly to God.

It is all about *unity*, among individuals, groups, cities and nations, which seeks to eliminate all discrimination and dreams of a future which could be expressed as: a united world. It is accomplishing a great deal of good in the world.

I say a great deal of good, but out of all proportion to any person or persons who might be instrumental in doing it.

It is, as we say, a work of God.

That is the secret of its success.

That is due to its evangelical spirit, ever up-to-date and modern, a gospel-based, collective spirituality, known as the *spirituality of unity*, capable of generating an entirely new way of living.

Through that spirituality, men and women everywhere today slowly but decisively are trying to become, at least in the places where they find themselves, the seeds of a new people that promotes a world of greater solidarity especially with the poorest and weakest, a world more united.

This can be a spiritual resource of love supporting the various forces already leading in that direction everywhere on earth.

It has a markedly communitarian dimension; in fact it is lived by people not only individually but also as groups small and large. Inspired fundamentally

by Christian principles — not disregarding but rather affirming parallel values in other faiths and cultures — it has brought unity into all areas of our world, which needs so much to rediscover and consolidate a sense of unity.

To explain it I need to relate something of the history of the Movement.

The Movement began in Trent. At the outset I had no plan in mind, no program. The idea for this Movement was God's; it was a project from heaven. That is how it was in the beginning; that is how it has been during the 54 years of its growth.

In 1943 war raged in Trent: ruin, destruction, death.

For a variety of reasons a group of young people about my age gathered around me.

One day I found myself with my new companions in a dark, candle-lit cellar, a book of the gospels in hand. I opened it. There was Jesus' prayer before he died: "Father ... may they all be one" (Jn 17:11, 21). It was not an easy text to start with, but one by one those words seemed to come to life, giving us the conviction that we were born for that page of the gospel.

On the feast of Christ the King we gathered around an altar. We said to Jesus: "You know the way to achieve unity. Here we are. If you so desire, use us." The liturgy of the day amazed us: "Ask of me," it said, "and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (Ps 2:8).

We asked. God is all-powerful.

The bombardment continued, destroying some of the people and things we cherished. One loved her home; it was ruined. Another was planning to be married; her fiancé did not return from the front. My ideal was to study, but the war kept me from attending the university.

Every event touched us profoundly. The lesson God was giving us in those circumstances was clear: all is vanity of vanities. Everything passes away.

At the same time God put a question into my heart meant for all of us, and with it came an answer: is there an ideal that does not die, that no bomb can destroy, to which we can devote our lives?

Yes, there is. That ideal is God.

We decided to make God the ideal of our lives. In the midst of war, the fruit of hate, God was manifesting himself to us as Love.

Our parents sought refuge in the mountain valleys. We stayed in Trent. Some for work or study. I in order to be with the Movement that was coming to life. An apartment with a few rooms became our shelter.

We found the ideal to live for. It was God, God-Love.