

## *Trinitarian Paradigm for Dialogue*

### ABSTRACT

A dialogue as a social reality consists, first and foremost, in communication between those who realize that they are called to notice and to accept the other and to treat him or her with proper respect. Such a dialogue may be motivated either by the desire to share the good or by the willingness to avoid conflict. The aforementioned approaches are marked by distinctly different attitudes, which are not only rooted in two different methodologies and have two different aims, but they also encompass two diverse procedures. More importantly, engaging in dialogue may also be motivated by realizing one's own mission in life, i.e. acting in harmony with the spiritual nature of the human being, who is a relational being. Upon realizing his or her likeness to the Triune God, i.e. the inseparable communion of the Divine Persons, a Christian discovers that the Holy Trinity constitutes the model and source for his or her own involvement in maintaining relationships with other people.

Chiara Lubich, the founder of the Focolare Movement was a contemporary thinker, who had realized and creatively developed the human vocation for unity in the likeness of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This movement, founded by Lubich, has both lay and consecrated members who are devoted to building the culture of unity based upon promoting dialogue as a tool for interpersonal communication. The aim of this article is to present the spiritual

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\* Correspondence regarding the paper should be sent to: Andrzej Derdziuk OFM Cap., The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Instytut Teologii Moralnej, Al. Raławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland, e-mail: [aderdziu@kul.pl](mailto:aderdziu@kul.pl)

experience of Chiara Lubich, which marks the origin of this new concept of a dialogue rooted in the mystery of Divine unity.

*KEYWORDS: Holy Trinity, Jesus Forsaken, dialogue, Focolare Movement.*

#### THE TRINITARIAN INSPIRATION UNDERLYING THE QUEST FOR UNITY

Chiara Lubich was not a philosopher, which is why the concept of dialogue formulated by her cannot be referred to as a product of scientific considerations, but rather, it can be described as the fruit of her spiritual experience of God, which was revealed to her in the difficult times of war in Trent. Chiara, together with a group of girls, took shelter in the basement of the Capuchin garden, when Allied Forces bombed her city. During that critical moment she was touched by God's grace. With the Bible in their hands, these young women were looking for their own path in life. Their hearts were filled with ambitious desires to find happiness and to achieve some position in society.

Guided by the words of Jesus: 'It is not anyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven.' (Matthew 7:21), Chiara and her friends decided to look for God's will with all their hearts (Lubich 1972, p. 7-9). They joined the Third Order of Saint Francis and submitted themselves to the spiritual direction of the Capuchin friars in Trent. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 1943 Silvia Lubich consecrated her life to God with the vow of chastity and strived for perfection in love. Furthermore, fascinated with St. Claire, she chose the name, by which she is known worldwide.

Upon the request of Fr. Casimiro Bonetti OFM<sup>Cap</sup>, the group of girls belonging to the Third Order of Saint Francis, started to serve the sick and the neglected. When one of the girls was infected by a serious illness, Fr. Casimiro visited her and brought her Holy

Communion. During one such visit, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1944, the girls were talking with him about the moment in which Jesus had been suffering the most. Bonetti made the girls realize that the most painful moment of the Passion was the experience of dying on the Cross (Lubich 1989, p. 323). After many years, Lubich described that discussion as follows: 'One day we were listening to the priest talking about the suffering of Christ. We heard that the moment when He suffered the most was when He cried out: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46) As we came back home, we were deeply moved by that teaching. Motivated by the desire to make the most of our lives, we decided to follow the example of «Jesus Forsaken» as we named Him in His suffering.' (Lubich 1972, p. 68).

Upon meeting God, who descended into the abyss of human suffering and loneliness without leaving the glorious Heaven, Lubich discovered that He is the loving Communion of Persons, willing to share themselves with the other. God is able to offer Himself with unbounded generosity, instilling in people the desire to selflessly serve their brothers and sisters. The founder of the Focolare Movement wrote: 'We perceive the abandonment in the following way; God, who is one in Three Persons – is He not at the same time the One and the Trinity both in time and beyond it – as it were – where Love dwells, where the Father is constantly begetting the Son and the Holy Spirit is constantly begotten as the Divine Person, who at the same time unites and differentiates the Father and the Son so that they are both One and the Trinity. In this case, was not the abandonment the «new» action, if one may say so, similar to the one that took place at the moment of the Incarnation, when the Holy Spirit established that the Word shall become Flesh or to the moment of the Resurrection, when the Father resurrected His Incarnated Son through the work of the Holy Spirit? When the Father saw that His Son was so obedient that he was ready to give new birth to His children, and to offer Him the new creation, (conf. 2 Corinthians 5:17) the Father

saw Him so similar to Himself and so equal to Himself, just like a second Father, he couldn't tell any difference between Him from Himself. It was a moment when God – who is love that is always new – let out clamours of new joy, along with the cry of unspeakable suffering within the humanity of Christ.' (Lubich 2001, p. 24).

Furthermore, the starting point for the understanding of the concept of dialogue developed by Lubich consists in the underlying selflessness of the Triune God, and not merely in the pragmatic desire to develop understanding. God, being perfectly happy and fulfilled, does not need creation to bring Him happiness, but out of mercy offers Himself, willing to make His creation happy: 'In «Jesus Forsaken» we are introduced into the heart of God – Love. God's Love, which made the Father offer us the Son, and the Son to offer us the Father, just like they are offering themselves to the Holy Spirit, is receiving us in the heart of Their life' (Lubich 1996, p. 72).

This assumes, on the part of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the eternal readiness for self-sacrifice. That readiness is inscribed in the Divine Nature. 'Love is not only the attribute of God, but is the very Essence of Him. And since God is Love, he is One and – at the same time – Triune: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus, especially in the Paschal event of his Passion, leading to His humbling in abandonment and death, which bore fruit in the Resurrection and Outpouring of Holy Spirit – reveals Love to be the Essence of the Holy Trinity.' (Lubich 2007, p. 294).

God, presenting every human being with life and the providential care for life and salvation, does not deprive people of freedom, because He lets every human being choose and freely accept or reject the gift of mercy. Hence, God is ready to suffer abandonment and humiliation, which was reflected in the abandonment of the dying Christ, crucified on the Cross. In other words, God is ready to 'cover the costs of action' in presenting human beings with freedom. These costs include also the possible failure of such an action.

The invitation for dialogue that Chiara Lubich lived by springs from the discovery of the absolute selflessness of God, who is unable not to love, because He is Love and that is why He always seeks to come into contact with every human being, with the aims of presenting them with life and redemption. All in all, God is the deepest source of life, including at the same time, the greatest realization of fatherhood and motherhood, ready to give life to the other and to sacrifice one's own life for the life of the people He created and who He views as His children in Christ. This religious experience led Chiara to get to know God in the loving light of faith and was intensified by her humble study of the Word of God and sharing her life with her sisters and brothers inspired by the spirituality of unity in the Church. In her growth of faith – which opened her to the richness of God's love – the founder of the Focolare discovered the abundance that she was provided with by her brothers and sisters. Consequently, dialogue became a tool, which facilitated the process of enriching exchange.

It is worth noticing that the mystery of the Holy Trinity, even though it was deemed utterly impractical by some philosophers, *inter alia* by Immanuel Kant (1971, p. 303), has always had a highly practical application. In the early centuries of Christianity, considerations about the Trinity led to the development of the concept of the person and contributed to a better understanding of the phenomenon of the human being, viewed as an individual. The psychological concept that explains the concept of the Holy Trinity put forward by St. Augustine includes the analysis of the person on the basis of the consideration of both the thought and communication processes on the level of epistemology. The word, the breath and the sound were supposed to better express the triple form of the content of communication. In this way, they were supposed to help in the understanding of the Trinity of Persons within the one Divine nature. Nevertheless, this concept was devoid of social context, which was why St. Augustine

claimed that comparing Divine Persons to family relationship is a theological fallacy.

The domains, which are particularly prone to be enriched with the inspiration of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, are as follows: anthropology, ecclesiology, sacramentology as well as moral and social theology. Furthermore, viewing the concepts of conscience, marriage and family theology from the Trinitarian perspective is of paramount significance and is subject to even more thorough studies. In the light of the mystery of Trinitarian love, one is able to deeper and more precisely grasp the mystery of a human being. 'A person, which is a relational being, needs reference to the other 'you' not merely to confirm one's own value and to find someone to share one's life with. Above all, the other person is necessary to offer him or her love, so that this person was able to pursue his or her vocation of offering oneself as a selfless gift. The truth about the Holy Trinity sheds light that uncovers the social dimension of the existence of the human being, whose endowment includes openness to communion' (Derdziuk 2010, p. 44).

Chiara Lubich made the contemporary transition between psychological trinitology and social trinitology. The source of inspiration for her spiritual activities derived from the Trinitarian faith, in which she found the model for establishing and maintaining a harmonious relationship based upon the absolute complementarity and irreducible autonomy of the Divine Persons. The Love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit constituted the foundation and point of reference in the understanding and promoting of unity between people. The academic community at the Sophia University in Loppiano and the Città Nuova Publishing House, where the Trinitarian idea is being cultivated, adopted her attitude. The publications within this domain are inspired by the charism of unity and address social and economic issues viewed from Trinitarian perspective.

Even though the aspirations for integrating human life according to the principle of unity stem from the domain of social

science, theology seems indispensable, because it constitutes the richest source of cognition of the human being, underlying human communities and is the key to understanding them. The most prominent authors associated with the Trinitarian spirituality of the Focolare Movement include: Piero Coda (1984, 1992, 1996), Klaus Hemmerle (1998/2003), Juan Castellano Cervera (1982), Enrique Cambón (1999) and Giuseppe M. Salvati (1997). It appears crucial to also mention Prof. Bernard Callebaut (2015), who delivered a series of lectures on economy, which had been inspired by the new anthropology and ethics of solidarity.

John Paul II was the other person who developed a theological thought based on the mystery of the Holy Spirit and undertook pastoral initiatives. He published three Encyclicals devoted to the respective Persons of the Holy Trinity and he added a Trinitarian dimension to the preparation for the Great Jubilee of the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event and Mystery of Incarnation. Consequently, he devoted the three last years of the past century to contemplating and revering the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, John Paul II devoted several Wednesday catechises to the mystery of the Holy Trinity from the perspective of the Christian spiritual life. Comparing the bond between the Divine Persons to the family and marriage, John Paul II indicated the social dimension of belief in the Holy Trinity. The example set by the Great Pope induced numerous authors to rethink the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and the world. In Poland, Rev. Prof. Janusz Nagórny creatively used categories of participation and objection defined by Wojtyła and investigated moral theology from the Trinitarian perspective and subject of dialogue (Derdziuk 2008, p. 195-205).

## THE ESSENCE OF DIALOGUE BASED ON GOSPEL VALUES

The prerequisites to dialogue include equality and respect for the arguments of the parties involved, along with a consideration for the diversity of scientific approaches and outlooks. The primary objective does not consist in convincing the other about the validity of one's views, but rather includes kind and reasonable openness towards the other "you". Not everyone is mature enough to engage in dialogue. The prerequisite for constructive dialogue is a fully-fledged identity and hope for justice, which goes beyond worldly things. Those who accept neither their destiny nor themselves, regardless of their virtues and weaknesses, are anxious of other people and perceive them either as accusers or as importunate inquirers, willing to gain favour or expecting assistance. In order to be able to give, one must first and foremost possess, but also be aware of one's own resources, which should not be depleted too soon.

Hence, it must be noted that any aspirations for developing an ideal society, either based upon the concept of Hobbes that is expressed with the dictum: *homo homini lupus* or upon the Marxist theory of class struggle are both pre-doomed to failure. After all, a dialogue that is grounded in a faulty anthropology does in any case lead to understanding based on truth, but merely promotes the rule of force. Furthermore, the contemporary dictate of relativism threatens the dialogue as such, because it negates the very possibility of seeking for the truth and consequently renders it impossible to find a common ground. In light of the above, seeking for the truth becomes the reason for a fight rather than the liberating factor of those united in the seeking. At the time when the encyclical of John Paul II *Veritatis Splendor* was published, some English reviewers were discussing the horror of the truth rather than the light of the truth, because they understood the proclamation of the truth as an oppressive tool for forcing one's own views upon the other person (Nowosad 2015, p. 95-122).



The progress of secularisation has not liberated human beings from alienation, rather it has caused an even greater captivity by half-truths, which became the dogmas of political correctness. 'Throwing the God of the Bible over the site of history as the atheistic humanism of nineteenth century European high culture did, had produced (among many other results) a culturally ingrained selfishness that impedes us from creating the human future in the most elemental sense: that of creating future generations' (Weigel 2015, p. 268).

The integral anthropology, based on the principle of non-contradiction and the hope for the cognition of the truth, constitutes the preliminary prerequisites of a dialogue respecting the dignity of the other participants of social discourse. Otherwise, one meets with wars and the destruction of human subjectivity, in particular of those thinking differently and possessing different customs and religions. 'Desperately defective ideas of the human person, married to modern technology, had turned the twentieth century into a slaughterhouse. Ideas have consequences, and bad ideas can have lethal consequences. Perhaps as many as 100 million human being had paid with their lives, in the first half of the twentieth century, for the consequences of some desperately defective ideas of *who we are*' (Weigel 2015, p. 46-47).

The unique perspective of dialogue viewed through the prism of theology makes it possible to construct the correct anthropology, based on the concept of the dialogic and relational nature of a person, created in the image and likeness of the Triune God. A human being, understood as a creation of God, is by nature someone, who needs the creative power calling him or her into existence and maintaining his or her existence. As a consequence of not being self-sufficient, a person becomes more open and sociable towards the other 'you'. This happens not out of a necessity of receiving some help, but rather it is a sign of a natural reaction to someone who is irrevocably bound with others by blood, cultural and spiritual ties. God instilled in every human being the

need for love, which makes him perceive others as brothers and sisters belonging to the same Divine family. The full understanding of human nature is only possible in the light of the revelation of the Holy Spirit; in which the human community gains its most accurate point of reference. That simultaneously indicates the very nature of a human being who is endowed with and called upon to establish and cultivate the *communio personarum* in the spirit of selfless love.

It is important to note the semantic range of the conciliar change of a human being as someone who has been created in the image and likeness of God in the Holy Spirit. The Second Vatican Council emphasizes that the bond with God is expressed in the 'likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself' (Gaudium et Spes 1965).

The relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, marked by sacrificial love, and willingness to offer oneself for others, constitutes an unattainable model and an incentive for those striving for unity based on the respect for the full and undistorted truth about reality. The abovementioned kind of love is, however, available to followers in the Holy Eucharist, which also has a Trinitarian structure. During the Mass the Church represents the sacrifice of Christ to the Eternal Father by the power of the Holy Spirit who changes the offerings of bread and wine into Flesh and Blood of the Saviour. Furthermore, the model of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit should constitute the point of reference for the followers, who are encouraged to do the same 'in remembrance of Him' (cf. Luke 22:19).

It is impossible to achieve moral perfection only by accepting the teaching and taking one's own decision to do good. A human being is on the horns of a dilemma and often feels lost as

a consequence of original sin, which is why he or she discovers that they need saving grace. Even the finest plans and the noblest intentions are not always effective, because people succumb to their cravings, are discouraged and fall prey to external influences.

As a result, people need the grace of forgiveness, which makes it possible for them to discover that they are beings, created in love and called for love by the Father, redeemed, led within the Church by the Son of God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, who pours selfless love in their hearts and gives them the capacity for self-sacrifice.

A dialogue for the purpose of achieving unity at the level of thought and action must be built upon the foundation of integral truth about the nature of human beings. Moreover, it should be established with reference to the Trinitarian model constituting an antidote to soothe the conflict between unity and plurality as well as between likeness and diversity. Preserving unity from the perils of both individualism and collectivism is not an easy task.

A human being is often incapable of keeping the right proportions between absolute autonomy and shallow uniformity. This issue becomes visible in the period of adolescence when a young person desires to be loved and be accepted by the closest people and at the same time he or she wishes to be distinct from others and free to make his or her own decisions. The unity of the Divine Persons revealed in the belief of the Church and experienced in the sacramental community of Christ's followers constitutes the pivotal foundation in the process of achieving harmony and promoting cooperation within a community.

Dialogue, as a tool for building interpersonal unity, encompasses different stages in the steady formation of human thought about seeking unity. The very beginning of such a formation takes place in the family, where every human being learns to notice the needs of others and to understand the necessity of modifying his or her behaviour to meet the expectations of others; such requirements set in the family do not restrict one's freedom but rather

stimulate his or her imagination of mercy. The ability to engage in a dialogue within a family (viz. the community in which the gift of life is passed on and in which the family members learn to fulfil responsible roles in society) must be based upon the belief that it is possible to build a community of love, making it possible for everyone to develop one's own identity to its fullest. Only selfless love provides a favourable and safe environment, in which a person is willing to develop his or her own potential and at the same time is eager to accept the guidance and assistance offered by others. The obedience of the Son to the Heavenly Father is rooted in His absolute trust in the Divine Plan of Salvation, in which even the most traumatic events cannot undermine the love that becomes a personal Gift of the Holy Spirit.

Chiara Lubich was validating the charism of unity by the strenuous efforts to preserve and promote unity between different movements and communities in the Church. The striving for the spirit of communion was reflected in the cooperation with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the communities of Neo-Catechumental Way, the Light-Life Movement and the Communion and Liberation movement. Lubich was of the opinion that this was a substantial contribution to promoting unity in the Church and validated the mission thereof in secularized society (Lubich 2007, p. 446).

Moreover, one particularly invaluable experience of the Focolare Movement consisted in establishing the bond of friendship and cooperation with members of different Christian denominations and followers of different religions. As the founder of the first community remembers: 'That kind of dialogue took us by surprise. We'd never thought that we were called for such a dialogue. It's true that whole the program is written in Heaven. The division of Christians reflects the face of Jesus Forsaken better than anything else' (Lubich 2001, p.102). Willing to do God's will and inspired by the desire to console Jesus Forsaken, Lubich, together with her collaborators, found out that the charism of

unity can be expressed by ecumenical involvement. The first non-Catholic members of the Focolare Movement were Lutherans, then Anglicans and also members of the Orthodox Church. Later on, the members of the Focolare Movement had engaged in dialogue with Muslims and Buddhists.

Nowadays, members of the Focolare Movement belong to more than 350 ecclesiastical communities. Additionally, Christians (also those consecrated) belonging to different churches are present in all the branches of the movement. According to the founder of the Focolare Movement such a dialogue is possible not only within the domain of joint endeavours aimed at alleviating social problems and striving for peace, but it also has its theological and anthropological dimension. The very act of engaging in a dialogue is underpinned by the profound belief that people are brothers and sisters and hence can refer to common beliefs. The Trinitarian paradigm of unity sheds light on the interreligious dialogue not by means of referring to the idea of one God, but by the manner of approaching the other, who, in any case, poses a threat for one's own, deeply rooted identity.

Lubich claims that the tools used for building interpersonal community based on dialogue include: prayer, listening to God's Word and responding to challenges faced by mankind. These challenges are posed, *inter alia*, by globalization, cultural diversity and migration. The emphasis of the Focolare Movement is placed on individual formation towards the life in faith and the members of the movement are encouraged to see the other as someone who can enrich them with his or her life experience, which shows the diversity of the charism of unity.

The Trinitarian mystery constitutes the source of inspiration and indicates the possibilities for further development of a human being, who is called to develop the relationships of love. At the same time, the sacrifice on the Cross, which is still accessible to everyone in the sacrament of the Eucharist, is the source of life-giving grace. This grace, in turn, gives the power to implement

the recommendations given by God (Lubich 2007, p. 193-194). A dialogue viewed as the art of living in openness towards the others is much more than merely a tool for communicating ideas. It is the way of living in which the unity of persons is validated by the readiness to serve one another, just like the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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