

## **Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

### ***Listening to the cry of the earth and of the poor***

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#### **Spiritual reflection (8<sup>th</sup> march 2019)**

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We have just heard from Pope Francis about the importance of interreligious dialogue, where he highlighted love as the foundation for a true dialogue between the faithful of different religions. This brings me to the experience of Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement. In fact, at the start of the Movement, during the Second World War, she made the powerful and illuminating discovery of God as love.

The Gospel was rediscovered as "Words to live" and especially the Testament of Jesus, "That they may all be one", became the Magna Charta of the Movement as it began.

God made Chiara understand the need to live for universal fraternity, to contribute with all the resources that exist in the Church and humanity, to bring about unity in the human family. In discovering God as Love, Chiara understood the strong bond linking all people because they are children of one Father and therefore brothers and sisters. Not only that, but nature too, created by God, and which St Francis called "sister", could contribute to the fulfilment of God's plan for the whole of humanity.

The charism of unity involves people from various churches, religions and cultures. It is called to give an injection of love, of fraternity, also in all fields of human knowledge. That is why ecology and the harmony of nature created by God have always been important for the Movement.

We might ask what contribution we can make, as men and women of many cultures and religious traditions, to the protection of our planet.

In paragraph 49 in *Laudato Si'* the Pope talks about integral ecology as a key concept that includes the environment, economics, society, culture and daily life, directing

them towards the common good and justice between generations. His words “**care for our common home**” are particularly meaningful.

To echo his words I would like to read some extracts from a letter Chiara Lubich wrote in 1990 to Nikkyo Niwano, a Japanese leader of Religions for Peace and founder of the Buddhist Movement Rissho Kosei Kai. She said:

*"The Earth in which we live is a "global village". This reminds us that God the Creator entrusted the earth to all ..."*

*"We need to apply all our spiritual resources, all our faith in the love of God; we need a great respect for the life of every created being and above all a new universal solidarity between persons and peoples, to give the course of events a new direction.*

*Without a new awareness of universal solidarity, there will be no step forward. Only religion can give this new awareness. ... The Bible teaches us that only in harmony with God's plan can nature and humankind find order and peace. If humankind is not at peace with God, the earth itself is not at peace."*<sup>1</sup>

Here, I may say, is the core of any kind of sustainable development, because human beings have within themselves the capacity to create a new society.

Chiara's letter continues:

*If we discover that all creation is a gift from a Father who loves us, it will be much easier to find a harmonious relationship with nature.*

*And if we also discover that this gift is for everyone in the human family, more attention and respect will be given to something that belongs to all humankind, both present and future".*

Furthermore, in May 2005, Chiara wrote a message to participants in a conference bringing together teachers, researchers and professionals active in the field of environmental sciences. Among other things she wrote:

*"We have always seen creation in its marvellous immensity as being ONE, emerging from the heart of a God who is Love".*

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<sup>1</sup> C. Lubich, letter to Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, President of the Rissho Kosei-kai, Rocca di papa, 8 March 1990.

*“We perceived the presence of God beneath things. So, if the pine trees were gilded by the sun, if the streams ran down in their glistening waterfalls, if the daisies and the other flowers and the sky were festive because of the summer, stronger yet was the vision of a sun that lay beneath all that is created. I believe we saw, in a certain way, God who sustains, who upholds all things.”*

*So it was also for every man and woman, for humanity, the flower of creation.*

*As a result we felt that each person had been created as a gift for the person next to them and those next to him or her had been created by God as a gift for them.*

*On earth all is in a relationship of love with all: each thing with each thing. »<sup>2</sup>.*

These words made me think of what Pope Francis has said in paragraph 240 of *Laudato Si'*. He says:

*“The world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. ...This leads us not only to marvel at the ... connections existing among creatures, but also to ... develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (240)*

All of us are called to engage with and collaborate in fulfilling God’s plan for the world. As Chiara Lubich said: *If the aim of men and women is not economic interests and selfishness but love for other people and for nature, through their contribution, the Earth will be transfigured until it becomes an earthly paradise.”<sup>3</sup>*

As a Catholic Christian, I feel greatly encouraged by what Pope Francis has said in his message for Lent which began two days ago. The title is:

*“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Rm 8: 19)”*

Among other things the Pope says:

*Creation urgently needs the revelation of the children of God,-who have been made “a new creation”.*

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<sup>2</sup> C. Lubich, to the *Congress of EcoOne*, in *focus: ecologia*, L. Fiorani, Nuova Umanità, XXXIV (2012/1) 199, pp. 50-51.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

He indicates how we can concretely live our faith and mentions three ways of doing this.

[By] **Fasting**, that is, learning to change our attitude towards others and all of creation, turning away from the temptation to “devour” everything to satisfy our voracity and being ready to suffer for love, which can fill the emptiness of our hearts.

**Prayer**, which teaches us to abandon idolatry and the self-sufficiency of our ego, and to acknowledge our need of the Lord and his mercy.

**Almsgiving**, whereby we escape from the insanity of hoarding everything for ourselves in the illusory belief that we can secure a future that does not belong to us. And thus to rediscover the joy of God’s plan for creation and for each of us, which is to love him, our brothers and sisters, and the entire world, and to find in this love our true happiness.

These are three “actions” that may be present in different ways in all religions that seek to reach God, the supreme being, to reach true happiness.