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Chiara Lubich's Pedagogy in the "Spiritual Thoughts of *Collegamento CH*"

Pedagogia Chiary Lubich w „Myślach duchowych konferencji telefonicznych *Collegamento CH*”

Summary: The current study addresses the writings by Chiara Lubich, who founded the Focolare Movement in the 1940s. Lubich adopted the “Spiritual Thoughts” as an education resource capable of reaching people and places that she could not physically reach. In addition, throughout her life, she developed an educational approach seen as a different Catholic pedagogy perspective due to its notoriety in the religious and social spheres. The aim of the current study is to investigate, through the analysis of one of the “Spiritual Thoughts” by Chiara Lubich, how she configured her educational practice through messages and, more specifically, to assess the pedagogical approach in her writings. The reflection presents the concepts of charisma, religious field and symbolic relations based on the historical and social perspective as theoretical reference.

Keywords: *Collegamento*; Chiara Lubich; catholic pedagogy; spiritual thought.

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Streszczenie: Niniejsze studium odnosi się do pism Chiary Lubich, która założyła Ruch Focolari w latach 40. XX wieku. Lubich użyła „duchowych myśli” jako materiału dydaktycznego, dzięki któremu możliwe było dotarcie do ludzi i miejsc, do których niemożliwe było dotarcie osobiste. Co więcej, przez całe życie dopracowywała własną strategię edukacyjną, którą można uznać za specyficzną pedagogię katolicką ze względu na jej odniesienia do kwestii religijnych i społecznych. Celem niniejszego studium było prześledzenie, poprzez analizę jednej z kolekcji „duchowych myśli” Chiary Lubich, w jaki sposób budowała własną praktykę edukacyjną z wykorzystaniem przesłań, a w konsekwencji próba ujęcia jej pedagogicznego stanowiska obecnego w jej pismach. Refleksja zawiera koncepcje charyzmatu, pola religijnego i relacji symbolicznych, zinterpretowanych w perspektywie historycznej i społecznej, jako teoretycznego punktu odniesienia.

Słowa kluczowe: *Collegamento*; Chiara Lubich; pedagogia katolicka; myśli duchowe.

The current article is inserted in a set of research focused on the Christian Pedagogy as their object of study and addresses the writings by Chiara Lubich, who founded the Focolare Movement in the 1940s. The aforementioned movement, which is widespread in more than 180 countries in five continents, was born in the Catholic context, although it presents ecumenical openness, as well as an inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.

According to Ruy Nunes¹, Christianity has a pedagogical character, since its doctrine enlightens mankind and provides the necessary means to reach the eternal happiness. Yet, based on the thoughts of this author, the New Testament goes beyond the general teaching of Christianity Pedagogy, but also provides the rules and warns about education for children, youngsters and adults.

Franco Cambi² corroborates such statement in his approach by emphasising the traces of the pedagogy found in the Gospels. He draws the histori-

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¹ Ruy Afonso da Costa Nunes, *História da educação na antiguidade cristã: o pensamento educacional dos mestres e escritores cristãos no fim do mundo antigo* [History of education in Christian antiquity] (São Paulo: EPU: Ed. Da Universidade de São Paulo, 1978).

² Franco Cambi, *História da Pedagogia* [History of Pedagogy] (São Paulo: Editora da UNESP, 1999), 123–124.

cal profile based on a Christian conception, which allows thinking about the education proposals highlighted by Christianity, by pointing out the Christian religion as an educational revolution.

With regard to the Gospels, some fundamental aspects of the Christian education become evident: it is designed and guided by a Master-prophet (such as Christ), who speaks against current habits and aims at triggering an inner change, an spiritual revolution, through messages that annoy and challenges tradition and subjective indifference; a message exemplified, for instance, in the Sermon of the Mont, given its references 'to the poor ones', 'to the ones who are thirst for justice', 'to the ones with pure heart', etc.

Throughout centuries, Christianity has built and managed a trajectory of strong interest to the History of Education. There are relevant aspects of school cultures developed by many saints, lays and religious congregations within its formation process. These individuals and congregations apply different educational practices, as well as use different pedagogical resources: newsletters, messages, spiritual thoughts, diaries, encyclicals and many kinds of letters.

Chiara Lubich used the different means of communication available at her time in order to widespread the Gospel to people in the five continents. Her pedagogy understood such analysis as the 'practice of teaching', which emerged in different ways during her trajectory, amongst them, through messages read during link-up phone calls, which were later published in books. She was focused on unifying different peoples and cultures with universal fraternity as her target.

Accordingly, the aim of the current study is to investigate, through the analysis of one of the *Spiritual Thoughts* by Chiara Lubich, how the founder of the Focolare Movement configured her educational practice through messages and, more specifically, to assess the pedagogical approach in her writings.

Lubich was born on 22nd January 1920 in Trent and died on 14th March 2008 in Rocca di Papa. Her school life began at Giovanni Battista Zanel-la Nursery School, which is the oldest child education institution in Trent; it was founded in 1841. Next, she studied at Giuseppe Verdi Elementary School for five years. After finishing Elementary School, she was enrolled in the N. E P. Bronzetti Vocational Training School. Later, she attended the lecture course at Antonio Rosmini Institute.

At that time, the education in Italy was characterised by the Reform implemented by Minister Giovanni Gentile, as well as by the methodological propositions by Maria Montessori (who underlined children's sensory motor experience) and by Maria Boshetti Alberti (who was responsible for implementing the serene school which, according to Cambi, was inspired by the ideal of continuity between school and family)³. There were also the propositions by sisters Carolina and Rosa Agazzi⁴, who emphasised the need of turning nursery schools into educational places in harmony with family and social lives.

Chiara initially worked as a teacher in Castello (Val di Sole) and in Varollo di Livo (Val di Non) in the Trentino region. Narratives about her teaching activity were described by biographers; they were possibly based on statements from former students and on records found in diaries and letters exchanged between her and her students. These descriptions enable thinking about aspects emphasised by the Active Pedagogy, mainly by Agazzi sisters' idea about nursery school.

After two years working in mountainous regions, and due to increased rumours about the World War II⁵, Lubich remained in Trent City and was invited to teach in a school for orphaned children in Cognola (near Trent), which was run by the Capuchins. The work in this school allowed her to exchange letters and notes with Piera Folgheraiter – a co-worker who often asked her to give out directions about the literacy process.

Lubich's path makes visible the earliest records of her epistolary writing date back to the late 1930s and 40s. They comprise of letters to family members, friends, co-workers, students, priests, nuns and to other groups of people⁶.

³ Idem, 518.

⁴ According to Franco Cambi (idem), these two sisters organized an innovative method for kindergarten. Similar to the Montessori method, they also privilege students' protagonism and the role played by educators as mediators and supporters of activities and propositions focused on discoveries.

⁵ In June 1940, Mussolini's Italy went to war along with Hitler's Germany and, despite the comments that everything would be resolved quickly, the same scene repeated in the station on a daily basis: amid tears, hugs and words of encouragement, people said goodbye to their children, siblings, friends and countrymen, who were sent to the battle front [Piera Folgheraiter, "La mia collega Silvia", *Rivista Città Nuova* 5 (2010): 46].

⁶ Chiara Lubich, *Lettere dei primi tempi (1943–1949): alle origini di una nuova spiritualità* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2010).

1. Spiritual Thoughts for *Collegamento CH*

In the 1980s, Chiara Lubich launched a new writing modality, i.e., the "Spiritual Thought", which is a message initially read in a *Collegamento CH*⁷ (a conference call initiated in Switzerland, in August 1980). This new type of communication was soon adopted in Italy: initially, every 15 days; later, every 30 days; and, currently, every 60 days.

Chiara Lubich's writings addressed some of the experiences lived by her and what she would like Focolare Movement members to put them into practice. The text was immediately faxed to the focolares in the world and later on published in the *Mariapoli* journal⁸. Some collections were published in books⁹, first in Italian and later in other languages such as Portuguese.

The collection analysed in the current study was written between 1981 and 1984: "it is a selection of messages full of experiences"¹⁰. They are thoughts directed towards people from five continents, besides having the typical epistolary writing formatting: place, date, initial greeting, initial contact, narration, petition and final greeting.

Although these messages were included in the book, they were written for the specific purpose of being read by Lubich in a telephone conference. From this reading on, they were converted into a guide to be followed by members of the Movement for 15 days. Since these messages became public through the book, it is possible to infer that, just as in an inventory of letters written by a certain individual, the messages went public due to the relevance of their writing. Similarly, this list of texts by Lubich stopped being

⁷ It is called CH because it is issued by a Swiss communication center and "CH" is the international acronym for Switzerland (*Confederazione Helvetica* – Helvetica Confederation). Nowadays, it simultaneously unites the members of the Movement in several countries of five continents through the Internet. In *Collegamento*, Chiara transmitted the spiritual thought as proposition of life to the members of the Movement. Nowadays, after greeting the regions and spreading the current news, Maria Emmaus Voce – Chiara's successor in the Presidency of the Movement – plays some recordings from previous *Collegamento* gatherings in which Chiara read the Spiritual Thought.

⁸ An internal journal of the Focolare Movement.

⁹ *La vita un viaggio* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1984); *In cammino col Risorto* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1987); *Cercando le cose di lassù* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1992); *Santi insieme* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1994); *Santità di popolo* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2001); *Costruendo il "castello esteriore"* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2002); *In unità verso il Padre* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2004).

¹⁰ Chiara Lubich, *A vida, uma viagem...* (São Paulo: Cidade Nova, 1986), 9.

just a single support accessed by few people to enable the wider circulation of her speech.

Publishing Lubich's ideas in a book enabled their wider circulation; thus, not only would the internal members of the Movement have access to her messages, but also people who did not adhere to spirituality. According to the editor, "although the *collegamento* message was primarily intended for members of the Movement, it goes beyond its limits due to its spiritual density and effective insistence on some fundamental points of Christian life"¹¹.

2. "Life, a journey..."

This book was translated in Brazil by Cidade Nova Publishing House and published in 1986. Its cover is white and has an image on the centre (a canvas created by the painter Adriana Magalhães Rocha from São Paulo). The prevalence of pastel green, blue and indigo shades gives the idea of sky at dusk, with hundreds of black and white birds flying in flocks – as when they migrate from cold countries seeking warmer temperatures.

The image seems to complete the ellipsis in the title since it resembles a journey towards infinity. Another interesting detail lies on the white and black birds. The black birds seem to outnumber the white ones, besides being more organised, since they indicate the direction to be followed. However, it is necessary to circumvent obstacles by climbing, descending and overcoming the sinuous sections in the image in order to reach the destination. Lubich signalled these difficulties through figures of Jesus on the Cross, "Jesus, who felt abandoned by all, including by the Father". The white colour refers to the light, which appears in the middle of, or after, darkness; moreover, it could be the "light" of Lubich's charisma. Thus, the artist seems to draft the content of the book on the canvas: birds flying in flocks towards infinity should encourage readers to walk together in the journey of life.

3. Analysing the messages

Description appreciations allow us to move in several directions, from the printed book to Lubich's act of writing to the time when she read the mes-

¹¹ Idem, 9.

sage to the members of the Movement during the *Collegamento* and from these moments to publication.

Lubich's writing is filled with Catholic religious precepts. We herein clarify that the current analysis does not intend to cover every aspect of the subject, as well as aim specifically to present a few aspects about how Lubich's educational practice was configured through the Spiritual Thoughts.

The introduction of the messages is similar to that of personal letters, being that it often comprises delicate courtesy and affection expressions towards the recipient ones. According to Lubich, "one should not save kindness in a letter"¹².

Since the messages were addressed to a large number of recipients, she uses the plural "carissimi" in the original Italian text, which means "my dear ones" or "dearest ones" – a gentle and affectionate expression. The editor of the Portuguese translation suggested the term "caros amigos" (dear friends), perhaps to make readers feel close to the author, since she could be an unknown figure for many of them.

Lubich started most of her Thoughts giving information about her recent activities, about some liturgical feast of that period, or about her current geographical location. She used an initial motivation to inform readers about the subject to be discussed, as well as about its foundation.

In her first message, Lubich justified the moment of communication by saying: "The reason driving me to address you is the desire to evaluate with you how close we are to our sanctification"¹³. The initial inspiration of this message, which was entitled "On the Holy Journey", came from Psalm 84: 5: "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage". Lubich's writing was motivated by a letter she received from a female member of the Focolare Movement, who talked about her personal purpose to live according to the bliss emphasised by the Psalm. Lubich seemed to approve her decision and decided to extend the proposition to all members of the Movement. Thus, she explained what the Holy Journey was all about: "it certainly concerns the journey of man towards God, towards heaven. Therefore, it is the journey towards sanctification itself, which opens the gates of paradise to us"¹⁴.

¹² Chiara Lubich, *Come un arcobaleno: Gli "aspetti" nel Movimento dei Focolari* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1999), 632.

¹³ Lubich, *A vida*, 11.

¹⁴ Idem, 11.

The term “Holy Journey” resurfaced in several messages and became the key to understanding the title of the book: “Life, a journey...” Lubich took it as slogan for the daily lives of the members of the Movement and for *Collegamento CH* moments. She also seemed to have learned a lesson from the sentence, which she said was new, and soon passed it on in order to teach everyone.

In the message from 3rd December 1981, she informed the addressees about the news she received through different communication means. She wanted to encourage them to keep on following her advice: “I learned from letters, communications and telegrams you sent me that some who had not yet decided to go on the ‘Holy Journey’ have resolutely embarked ‘on the train’, ready to travel along with all others who this *Collegamento* is addressed to”¹⁵. One can notice reciprocity in the communication process, since people receiving the messages would write back to Lubich.

Even when Lubich addressed a specific religious theme, such as prayer or the will of God¹⁶, some of the arguments substantiating the preceding messages reappeared in her discourse, such as the holy journey, the love of neighbour, Jesus on the cross, among others.

Based on reflections by Pierre Bourdieu¹⁷, one can think about the possibility that, according to indications about religion or more specifically the Catholic Church, how having Lubich’s addressees appropriate her message conveys the symbolic structure of thought. Although Lubich faced some acceptance difficulties within the Catholic Church at the beginning of the Movement, she eventually gained space and legitimation in the religious field. Consequently, her cultural and religious capital increased, giving her a power that did not result from economic or social strength, but from the cultural and symbolic goods she attained.

Lubich’s narratives also alluded to conversations and the letters she received, to festivities such as Christmas, Easter and Focolare Movement anniversary celebrations, as well as to personal experience reports. In the thought titled “Yes to Jesus, no to our own self”, she wrote:

¹⁵ Ibidem, 23.

¹⁶ The Will of God is one of the main points of the spirituality of Focolare. Lucia Abignente gathered the most significant writings about the subject. For more details see: Chiara Lubich, *La Volontà di Dio* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2011).

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, “Gênese e estrutura do campo religioso” [“Genesis and structure of the religious field”], in: Pierre Bourdieu, *A economia das trocas simbólicas* [*The economy of symbolic exchanges*] (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2005), 45–46.

These past days, I read a wonderful page of Apostle Paul's letters and it seemed to me that I understood how he personally experienced the cuts mentioned by Jesus. After inviting Christians to imitate the athletes who make so many sacrifices to win a trophy, and speaking of himself, he states: "I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Cor 9: 27). In fact, Paul should cultivate his bunch, or rather, his vines full of bunches scattered in every region he evangelized. This is what is going on in his soul as he thinks about the people entrusted to him. He realises the desire, feels the impulse and the need to become an example to all. In order to do so, as he says, he disciplines his body and brings it under strict control. This is what we should do to our own self¹⁸.

Assumingly, Lubich was inspired by Apostle Paul's teachings when she wrote this message, since she stated that he should cultivate his "bunch, his vines full of bunches"¹⁹. She had suggested to the members of the Movement that they should organise themselves in bunches to facilitate community life. She thought about this organisation modality as something already put into practice by Paul in order to give it more credibility. When the Apostle wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians, he emphasised his concern about sanctification: "For this is God's will, your sanctification" (1 Thess 4: 3). Paul was forming the first Christian communities and needed to give instructions on how they should behave; thus, he wrote about each particular situation he knew.

Lubich was forming the communities of her Movement and wanted to bring her "gift" to them all in order to educate her followers. Thus, she addressed the symbolic well, compared her actions to the lives of Saints and stimulated readers' imagination so that they too could be able to mimic the Apostle. Lubich read Paul's letter, approached the reading to the reality of the Movement and, by speaking about virtues and about being careful not to sin or develop habits that deviate from God, she invited Focolare members to follow the Apostle's example.

She also referred to mimicking the virtues of other Saints in several messages; she wrote and tried to be informed about the current events in the Catholic Church and wanted all members of her Movement to live in harmony with the aforementioned institution. In a thought about Maximilian

¹⁸ Lubich, *A vida*, 63.

¹⁹ She refers to groups and communities followed and evangelized by the Apostle.

Kolbe, she invited them to mimic the Saint; not exactly his physical life, but mainly his will to exercise humility in his personal relationships and to put love into practice.

Lubich told a story in one of her messages. Although she did not mention the source of it, it is believed to be a biographical reading or a movie: “A young mother of ten children was affected by a tumour and entrusted each of her children to different families. When she was feeling close to death, the woman visited them for the last time in a long and tiring journey. After fulfilling this last duty, she lied down on her bed and said: ‘everything is in order’. This mother really teaches us what love is”²⁰.

Lubich’s great concern seemed to be searching, in these stories and readings, something to help the members of the Movement to live the Gospel in a concrete way, i.e., to help them seeing the lessons to be learned from her narrative. She wanted to educate “her people”, who were no longer limited to few students in a small room or to the Italian communities; they were many and spread all over the world. She needed to be objective and to use the evangelising didactics of unit, which was an element that she seems to have developed in her teaching practice. She used didactics in many ways, including reports about her journey observations

These days, the Far East led us to other purposes. I herein cite two of them: the first one lies on us all becoming “locomotives”. In fact, many young people draw or build a train to represent the “Holy Journey” and they often put my name on the locomotive. However, only God knows who really drives it. It is certainly the one who loves the most!

Then, the second purpose: our Buddhist friends taught us that the extinguished candle is one of their symbols. It means total mortification, complete absence of desires. They are worthy of our admiration for the way they put it into practice²¹.

Lubich was in China when she read this message. She talked about purposes and about how members of the Movement were putting their inspirations into practice, while also citing Buddhists’ commitment to the practice of their faith. She also talked about locomotives, candles and about drawings, besides using representative examples. Her narrative involved the in-

²⁰ Lubich, *A vida*, 38.

²¹ *Idem*, 27.

terlocutors in such a way that it made them wait immediately for the concrete suggestion from Lubich.

The countries and continents mentioned in her messages showed to the world the cultural and local aspects of the places she had visited. It was perhaps a way to make people more open to others who were often discriminated. These journey reports have tended to enable her interlocutors to expand their knowledge about Culture, History and Geography.

Chiara Lubich used words from the environment she was in to write her messages: kangaroo, ostrich, bamboo cane and coat of arms. She also collected physical and natural elements to illustrate her narrative: animals, birds, vegetation, roots, fatigue, sweat, rest, training. She compared them to the lives of members of the Movement and linked them to her doctrinal and formative indications.

Lubich's accounts also emphasised the strength of the autobiographical writing. Her descriptions were very similar to the ones written in diaries. In addition, she revisited stories from previous years and exercised readers' memory. Her narrative about tours, travels, TV shows, movies, sports competitions and readings worked as argument in her lessons, besides drawing attention to the importance of dedicating moments of the day to relaxation, leisure and rest. She was concerned about educating people and the roots of such concern lead us to her concept of education, which was made explicit in November 2000, when she was awarded the title of Dr. *Honoris Causa* in Pedagogy: "Education can be defined as the path students (individual or community) travel through, with the help of the educator or educators, towards 'what they should be', towards a valid goal for man and for humanity"²².

According to Lubich, education is a process to be followed by individuals; however, these individuals must count on teachers or guides' collaboration. Apparently, she also played this role through her messages since she was the educator mediating this learning process. In her *Spiritual Thoughts*, Lubich insisted on reminding her interlocutors that God is Love²³, that He loves everyone. "He is an educator par excellence: God the Love, God the Father"²⁴.

²² Chiara Lubich, *Ideal e Luz: Pensamento, Espiritualidade, Mundo Unido [Ideal and Light: Thought, Spirituality, United World]* (São Paulo: Brasiliense; Vargem Grande Paulista, SP: Cidade Nova, 2003), 275.

²³ The idea of God that is "Love" is based on the First Letter by Saint John 4: 16: "God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him".

²⁴ Lubich, *Ideal e Luz*, 276.

Lubich talked about education focused on unity, on reciprocal help, on sharing. She wanted education to enable the harmonious coexistence among people, similar to the one presented by two disciples when the Risen Jesus appeared to them on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13–35). Although she confirmed this pedagogy style as typical of the Focolare Movement, she was aware of the limitations and methodological implications of this educational endeavour. Lubich even said that it looked like a utopian project, but she recalled that every authentic pedagogy had once carried a utopian purpose. In the case of the Focolare Movement, she did not see it as an unattainable goal because it was possible to see the results of this pedagogy in different spheres of society. By basing education on pedagogical values, Lubich expected the members of the Movement to make their “Holy Journey” in a coherent way.

It is possible to see that Lubich’s writing often resorted to the use of questions and answers. If one takes into consideration her commitment to and passion for philosophy, it is possible wondering whether Lubich would have been inspired by the educational method based on Socrates’ maieutics: “know thyself”. Some statements from Lubich’s former students enable an understanding of how it previously worked in her school practice. According to Contardo Zeni:

When she asked her students questions, she always said: What do you think? What do you say about it? She would ask us before giving her answer. She put the problem before the students. Depending on the students’ response, she added her words. It was the most important thing for us. She respected the personality of each student. For me, it was a moment of intellectual growth: I mean, making questions and giving answers. For example, she would take the world map as resource in a Geography class and say: now let’s visit Russia. Where would you leave from? What city would you depart from? What is the best route to arrive to the destination? The longest or the shortest way? What things can you find along the way? And what races? What do you feel? How would you understand each other if they speak a different language? There was the urge to say: look at their habits and customs. Why do they do this? Why do they do that a little different from us? This was a fabulous part of her pedagogy²⁵.

This practice modality adopted in the classroom was characterised by aspects described by methodological approaches of the active pedagogy. Lu-

²⁵ Contardo Zeni, “La maestra, Silvia non aveva la matita rossa”, *Rivista Città Nuova* 1 (2011): 40.

bich used a dialogue-based pedagogy in the school environment and resorted to it in her written messages. This pedagogy of questions and answers is very much present in Catholic manuals, mainly in catechisms. This movement of questions and answers is also evident in Apostle Paul's letters. This approach, which is part of the Catholic practice of interacting with the reader (directly found in catechisms), is thus found in other printed matters.

4. A planetary classroom

The *collegamento* experience and the submission of her messages to five continents at the same time allowed Lubich to have more than a small group of people before her in the classroom. The media permitted her to talk and write to thousands of individuals from different parts of the world.

The Focolare Movement began in the Catholic Church, before the Second Vatican Council, in which lay people did not have much credibility. Accordingly, Lubich faced several obstacles to enter the religious field which, according to Bourdieu²⁶, is a field whose agents fight to impose the legitimate definition not only of what religious is, but also of different ways of playing the religious role.

Lubich walked in this field, set relationships with some Church personalities and established herself, besides being respected and esteemed by bishops, cardinals and even by Popes. She was the only lay woman to implement a Catholic Movement in the twentieth century.

Lubich appointed herself and became known in the religious environment as having "charisma" – the charisma of unity. The word 'charisma' comes from the Greek *chárisma*, which means "gift", i.e., "it is a divine gift given to an individual for the good of the community"²⁷. According to Smerilli, from the Catholicism perspective charisma is:

Something that brings joy. *Chárisma* or *kharis* also has the root of the word 'gratuitousness': a free inner attitude that drives people to put themselves beside each living being, person, activity, nature and themselves, based on the understanding that they are not "things" to be used, but realities to be respected

²⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Coisas ditas [Said things]* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1990).

²⁷ Aurélio Buarque de Holanda Ferreira, *Novo Aurélio século XXI: o dicionário da língua portuguesa* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999), 411.

and loved, because they have an intrinsic value that people accept and acknowledge as good²⁸.

Lubich's "charisma of unity" aimed at uniting people to fulfil Jesus' request described in the Gospel by John, chapter 17, verse 21: "May they all be one". If one thinks about charisma as defined by Bourdieu – i.e., as reserved to "designate the symbolic properties (first, the symbolic efficacy) added to religious agents insofar as they adhere to the ideology of charisma, i.e., the symbolic power resulting from the fact that they believe in their own symbolic power"²⁹ – the fact that the religious leader believes he has charisma gives him a power granted to himself, which also reflects on his leadership to others. Thus, charismatic leaders impose power and they are a symbolic representation of someone who "brings down from heaven what he/she sends back from Earth"³⁰.

The idea that Lubich was endowed with charisma gave her symbolic power, credibility and leadership – proof lies in the fact that thousands of people from five continents joined the Focolare Movement. Lubich used the social media as allies because they enabled the members of the Movement to communicate faster. Thus, Lubich clearly used the Spiritual Thoughts as a viable strategy to keep in contact with people and to spread her charisma.

But why did she write? What argument did she emphasise? If one takes into consideration the teacher/student, receiver/sender relationship in Lubich's writings, it is possible saying that she put into practice the Christian Pedagogy widespread by the church throughout the centuries, which was mainly emphasised by the popes, in order to achieve a new evangelisation. Lubich used her intelligence to elaborate the arguments she wanted to put in evidence; she would experience it herself before she sent the message to others.

The herein analysed "Spiritual Thoughts" showed that Lubich's writing was based on a pretext, i.e., on the desire to communicate with people. Thus, her messages were used as a communication strategy. However, she seized the opportunity not only to give news, but to teach and train the members

²⁸ Alessandra Smerilli, <http://www.edc-online.org/br/home-br/eventos-no-brasil/especial-brasil-2011-pt-br-1-1/1747-a-edc-como-um-caminho-para-a-renovacao-dos-carismas.html> [May 28th, 2011].

²⁹ Bourdieu, "Gênese", 55.

³⁰ Idem, 55.

of her Movement. Indeed, it is possible saying that the "Spiritual Thoughts" have become part of an education-oriented strategy adopted by Lubich.

However, she did not know all the people she was writing to; it took wisdom to find the right words that should sink into the unknown field. Thus, although Lubich was a subject of power with her strategy of speech and writing, she had to deal with limitations such as lack of power to look at people. As she used to hear voices, her message had to be carefully prepared and, in order to do so, she needed to develop different writing processes and to have a convincing set of arguments. Thus, she made several movements and used different resources to illustrate and send her messages at the properly calculated time.

Some considerations

Initially, Lubich's messages were individually produced within a given context and addressed to a specific group – members of the Focolare Movement. They were then converted into a book, which allowed a larger number of people to have access to a wide range of subjects. It is possible to elaborate a chain of connections among Lubich's writing, her communication and training means, to the extent these strategies have acquired.

The messages came from a central place with authorised symbolic power in the scope of a Movement acknowledged by the Church. They were written by a person who had the "gift of grace" and, consequently, who had broad symbolic capital. She wanted to spread her charisma, as well as to enable the encounter of members of the Movement: "I informed you about it, and it must be passed on to others, since it also belongs to others, not only to the people it was passed on to"³¹. Thus, she first used her messages as communication strategy and then developed a pedagogical process, where the writing of her thoughts worked as didactic resource to help applying her strategies.

In driving a formative discourse, the writings have reached a previously established space – the Movement communities – where they enabled moments of encounter, reading, listening and fraternal sharing. This process confirmed the idea of unity in the Movement. Next, the message printed in the minds of people and materialised in her writing should reach other environments such as home, family, school, Church, work, company and society, through life, practical actions and testimonies.

³¹ Lubich, *In cammino*, 10.

Chiara Lubich's educational approach has inspired countless educators³² across the five continents in many ways, so producing significant outcomes in the scholar and scientific fields, in society as a whole and in the church itself. Among the most relevant concrete fruits from her Christian Pedagogy – driven to the “Holy Virgin” – we find the 17 beatification processes used to assess the life and virtues of members of the Focolare movement in many countries, as well as the already-acknowledged holiness of young Chiara Luce Badano, who was the first member of the movement to be beatified.

Lubich's method has led to a different Catholic education paradigm based on principles such as unity, mutual tolerance, communion, solidarity and fraternity. Studying her writings enabled her activities to be followed. The activities of the woman who, despite being out of the school environment was able to provide education and guidance through her “Spiritual Thoughts”, as well as to convey Catholic values to people all over the world.

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³² For more details see: Maria José Dantas, “Escrever-te-ei... tu também me escreverás?” *A escrita epistolar católica como prática docente: um olhar sobre Chiara Lubich e suas estratégias de formação*. Tese de Doutorado em Educação. Universidade Federal de Sergipe, Programa de Pós Graduação em Educação (São Cristóvão, 2014).

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