

Chiara Lubich: for a politics of unity

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1. Politics as love

A political vocation¹

There is a true and proper political vocation. It is a personal calling that emerges from circumstances and is communicated through one's conscience. Those who believe clearly discern God's voice entrusting them with a task. But also those who do not adhere to any particular faith feel the political calling, perhaps inspired by a social need, by a minority group that needs help, by a violated human right, or by the desire to do something good for their city or nation.

Politics as “love of all loves”²

Furthermore, the response to a political vocation is before all else an act of brotherhood. In fact, one does not become politically active simply in order to resolve a problem; one acts in response to a public need and deals with questions that concern others, wanting their good as if it were one's own.

By living in this way, politicians are able to give their total attention to citizens, to get to know their needs and their resources. They are able to understand the history of their city, to value the heritage of its culture and its associations, to discern, little by little, its true vocation and to map out with confidence a path to be followed.

In fact, politics seen as love creates and preserves those conditions that allow all the other types of love to flourish: the love of young people who want to get married and who need a house and employment; the love of those who want to study and who need schools and books; the love of those who run their own businesses and who need roads and railways, clear and reliable laws.... Thus, politics is the love of all loves, gathering the resources of people and groups into the unity of a common design so as to provide the means for each one to fulfil in complete freedom his or her specific vocation. But it also encourages people to co-operate, bringing together needs and resources, questions and answers, instilling mutual trust among all. Politics can be compared to the stem of a flower, which supports and nourishes the fresh unfolding of the petals of the community.

¹ From *The Spirit of Brotherhood in Politics, key to the Unity of Europe and of the World* in “Nuova Umanità”, XXIV (2002/1), n.139, pp.15-28

² Ibidem

Politics, a "background" for society³

One day I seemed to understand in what sense politics could be considered love. If we were to give a colour to every human activity, to economy, to health, communication, art, culture, the administration of justice ... politics would not have a colour. It would be the background, it would be black so as to highlight all the other colours. For this reason politics should seek to be in constant dialogue with every other aspect of life, in order to provide the conditions for society itself, in all its expressions, to achieve its design completely. Of course, in this constant attention toward dialogue, politics must reserve to itself certain areas: promoting fair, unbiased policies; giving preference to those in need; fostering participation at all times, which means dialogue, mediation, responsibility and practical action.

Fraternity as a political category⁴

These three: liberty, equality, fraternity, almost sum up the political program of the modern world, expressing a deep intuition and leading us to a profound reflection today. But what point have we reached in achieving these great aspirations?

The French Revolution announced these three principles but it certainly did not invent them. They had already been elaborated through the centuries, above all through the Christian message, which enlightened the best ancient traditions of the various peoples and drew on the heritage of Jewish revelation, bringing about a true revolution. The new humanism revealed by Christ enabled people to live these principles to the full.

From that announcement onwards, and down the centuries, the richness of these principles has been revealed through the works of men and women. ...

Liberty and equality have deeply marked the political history of peoples, resulting in a more civilized society and creating the conditions for the expression of human dignity to grow. ...

Liberty and equality have become juridical principles and are applied every day as real and true political categories.

But as we know well, if emphasis falls solely on liberty, it can easily become the privilege of the strongest. And as history confirms, emphasis solely on equality can result in mass collectivism. In reality, many peoples still do not benefit from the true meaning of liberty and equality....

³ From *Liberty, equality... whatever happened to fraternity?* House of Commons, Westminster, London, 22 June 2004, published in *Essential Writings*, New City Press 2007, p.263

⁴ Ibidem, p.258.

Universal fraternity⁵

How can these be acquired and brought to fruition? How can the history of our countries and of all humankind resume the journey toward its true destiny? We believe that the key lies in universal fraternity, in giving this its proper place among fundamental political categories.

Only if taken together can these three principles give rise to a political model capable of meeting the challenges of today's world. ...

These are some of the major challenges facing the world today that urgently call for the idea and the practice of fraternity, and since this is a worldwide problem, they call for universal fraternity.

Many great thinkers promoted universal fraternity.

Mahatma Gandhi said: "The golden rule is to be friends with the world and to consider the whole human family as 'one'."⁶ ...

However, the one who brought fraternity as an essential gift to humanity, was Jesus who prayed shortly before he died: "Father, may they all be one" (Jn 17, 21). In revealing God as our Father, he made us all brothers and sisters and broke down the walls which separate those who are "the same" from those who are "different", friends from enemies.

Fraternity, then, is the ideal that we need to affirm. Fraternity is an ideal for today.

But are there signs of fraternity in people's lives today?

Over the years, I've experienced so often God's providential hand in my own life and in the lives of others. And I've had direct contact with many peoples, and have learned to recognize these steps which are a sign of the progress of humanity, to affirm that humanity is travelling on a slow, but unstoppable journey towards universal fraternity. ...

The signs of this are:

- The coming together of separate states and the processes of an economic and political integration —and here we cannot fail to mention Europe—which are gaining strength both on a continental level and in other geopolitical areas.
- The role of international organizations, especially the United Nations, more crucial today than ever in knowing, facing and responding to the key questions affecting the lives of peoples and countries.
- The development of an increasingly wide and fruitful dialogue among people of various Christian traditions, with people of different religious faiths, and also with people who have no particular religious affiliation.
- The growth of social, cultural and religious movements which present themselves as new leading figures in international relations and working together toward worldwide objectives.

⁵ Ibidem, pp.258-260.

⁶ Cit. in *In buona compagnia*, edited by C. Mantovano, Rome, 2001, p. 11.

2. Instruments and methods for politics in unity

Politics and “the art of loving”⁷

How should we live fraternity and in which ways does it help politics to fully carry out its responsibilities and tasks? In order to explain this, I must address a few aspects of fraternal love ... and see how they are lived within politics.

First of all, for politicians of unity, the choice to be politically committed is first of all an act of love. With this they respond to an authentic vocation, to a personal call. They respond to a social need, to a problem in their city or the suffering of their people and the needs of their time. Those who are believers sense that it is God calling them through the different circumstances. The non-believers respond to a human question that resonates within their conscience: but both imbue their actions with love and both find their home in the Movement for Unity.

In second place, the politicians for unity are aware that, if politics is love right from its roots, even the political adversaries may have made their own decisions out of love. This requires mutual respect, understanding the essence of their commitment, going beyond their ways which are often marked with animosity with which their agendas are lived and that can always be corrected.

The politicians for unity have at heart that also their adversaries may fulfil the good plan they are proposing because, if they respond to a call, to a real need, which is an integral part of that common good that can only be constructed together.

The politicians for unity therefore love not only those who vote for them, but also their adversaries; not only their own party, but also the other's party; not only their own country, but all of humanity.

And loving everyone makes them understand and live the universal dimension of politics.

Furthermore, the politicians of unity cannot remain passive in the face of conflicts, often harsh ones, which create divides between politicians and citizens. On the contrary, they must be the ones to take the first step, even just with a simple greeting, in order to reach out to the others, re-establishing broken lines of communication.

Creating personal relationships where they don't exist, or where they have been damaged, may at times mean being able to unblock a political stalemate.

Taking the initiative in loving, for the politicians for unity, is an act that honours the dignity of the human being, but also transforms into a real political activity; it helps to overcome prejudices and roles, which very often paralyze politicians in useless oppositional stances.

Another aspect of fraternity in politics is the capacity to set oneself aside so as to make space for the other person, to remain silent so as to listen and hear ones

⁷ From *The Movement for Unity and Political Fraternity*, Conferral of the Honorary Citizenship - Turin, 2 June 2002. [Translation from Italian text]

opponents. It's a "losing oneself" which every day renews the initial political commitment, through which we decided to be concerned about the others' well-being and not about ourselves. In this way we "make ourselves one" with them, we open ourselves up to the reality that they live. Making ourselves one helps to see beyond one's own agenda, makes us understand aspects of the others, of life, of reality, that also open up a wider political horizon: the politicians who learn to make themselves one with everyone are able to better understand and make proposals. The art of "making ourselves one" is a true political realism.

Finally, fraternity finds its full expression in reciprocal love. Democracy, if understood correctly, has a great need of it: love among politicians, and among politicians and citizens.

The politicians for unity are not satisfied with loving on their own, but they also try to bring others, whether colleagues or opponents, to love. This is because politics is relationship, a common project, not only based on individual decisions. It is a reciprocal love that politics requires not only in personal relationships, but as an institutional need. The different tasks that a democracy assigns, in their deepest meaning, have the end goal of fostering reciprocal love: if the government's action of love is expressed in the decision or proposal, the response of love from the opposition is accomplished through their counter-proposal and political power.

A price to pay⁸

All these aspects of political love, which build fraternity, require sacrifice. So often political activity has led to loneliness, to a sense of being misunderstood even on the part of one's closest collaborators! ...

politicians are persons who take upon themselves the divisions, rifts, and wounds of their people. This is the price of fraternity asked of politicians: a very high price, but the reward is just as high. Faithfulness in the moment of trial will make politicians a model, a point of reference for their co-citizens, the pride of their people.

A pact of fraternity⁹

It would be good to invite all those involved in politics to make a pact of fraternity for the benefit of their country, one that puts its good above all partial interests, whether those of individuals, groups, classes or parties.

Fraternity offers surprising possibilities. It helps to bring together and give value to demands that otherwise could develop into insoluble conflicts. It harmonizes the experience of local autonomy with the sense of a shared history. It strengthens our awareness of the importance of international organizations and all those systems that attempt to overcome barriers and take important steps toward the unity of the human family.

⁸ From *Fraternity in politics*, Catalan Parliament - Barcelona, 29 November 2002 [Translation from Italian text]

⁹ From *Liberty, equality... whatever happened to fraternity?*, cit. pp.262-263.

Fraternity can give rise to projects and actions in the complex political, economic, cultural and social fabric of our world. Fraternity brings peoples out of their isolation and can offer the opportunity for development to those still excluded from it. It shows us how to resolve differences peacefully and relegates war to history books. Fraternity in action allows us to dream and even to hope for some kind of communion of goods between rich countries and poor countries.

The profound need for peace expressed by humanity today indicates that fraternity is not only a value, not only a method, but also the global paradigm for political development. This is why an increasingly interdependent world needs politicians, entrepreneurs, intellectuals and artists who put fraternity—an instrument of unity—at the centre of their actions and thoughts. Martin Luther King dreamt that fraternity would become the organizing principle for business people and the principle of organization for people who govern. The politicians of the Movement for Unity in Politics want to make this dream a reality.

A truly authoritative politics¹⁰

And in my opinion this is a kind of politics worth living. It forms politicians capable of recognizing and serving the vision for their community, their town and nation, indeed for all humanity, because fraternity is God's vision for the whole human family. This is the kind of genuine, authoritative politics that every country needs. In fact, with power comes strength but only love gives authority. This type of politics builds works that will last. Future generations will be grateful to politicians not for having retained power but for how they used it.

3. Unity, beyond globalization

"I have a dream"¹¹

I dream of a growing consciousness of human brotherhood and sisterhood, which, already noticeable today among millions of people, may increase on earth and become a more widespread, universal reality in the next millennium.

Together with this I dream that wars, conflict, hunger and the many evils of the world will recede.

I dream of a great dialogue of love among the Churches so that the formation of the one Church, which is so close, may become reality.

I dream of the deepening of an active, living dialogue amongst people from different religions who are linked by love, "the golden rule" present in all their holy books.

I dream of a coining together in mutual enrichment of the world's many cultures, so much so that a world culture will arise that will emphasize values, which have always been the true riches of individual peoples, and that these values may then

¹⁰ Ibidem, p.264.

¹¹ From *A Dream for the New Millennium*, published in New City Magazine, Philippines, March 2000

be adopted as global wisdom.

I dream that the Holy Spirit will continue to inundate the Churches and highlight the "seeds of the Word" beyond them, so that the world may be engulfed with continual newness of light, of life and of works which only He can bring about. May this happen so that more and more men and women follow the right road and may meet their Creator, placing their hearts and souls at His service.

I dream of evangelical relationships not only among individuals, but also among groups, movements, religious and secular associations; among peoples and states, so that it becomes logical to love another's country as one's own. It is logical to work towards a universal communion of goods, at least as a final goal.

I dream of a world united in its variety of peoples who recognize each other in the alternation of one authority.

I dream therefore of a foretaste of new heavens and new earths, however possible this may be here on earth. I dream a great deal, but we have a millennium to see it fulfilled.

Interdependence¹²

The reality of interdependence calls to mind an ideal which is very dear to me, an ideal for which I decided to give my life, together with many people of good will involved in politics, economics and different fields of action and study: the unity of the human family.

On the day after September 11 [2001], many of us felt the need to reflect deeply about the causes, but above all, to work towards a true, responsible, resolute alternative to terrorism and war. For me, it was a little like reliving the devastation and feeling of human powerlessness that I experienced in the Italian city of Trent when it was being bombed during World War II.

And yet it was precisely beneath the bombs that my first companions and I discovered in the Gospel the light of mutual love which prompted us to be ready to give our lives for one another. It was in the midst of that debris and destruction, convinced that "Love wins everything", that we felt the passionate desire to share this love with all our neighbours, with no discrimination among persons, groups, peoples, and without being conditioned by the other person's social condition, culture or religious convictions.

Likewise, many of us are asking today, in New York as in Bogota, in Rome as in Nairobi, in London as in Baghdad, if it is possible to live in a world of peoples who are free, equal and united, not only respecting one another's identity, but also mindful of their particular needs.

There is only one answer: not only is it possible, but it is the very essence of the political plan for humanity.

While respectful of thousands of different identities, the unity of peoples is the very goal of politics. This is put into question today by the violence of terrorism, war, the unjust distribution of the world's resources and social and cultural inequities.

¹² From the *Message to the participants of the First World Day of Interdependence*, Philadelphia (USA), 12 September 2003 [Translation from Italian text]

In many places in the world today, a cry of abandonment rises from millions of refugees, from millions of people who are starving, from millions of people who are exploited, from millions of unemployed who are excluded and seemingly "cut off" from the political body. It is this separation, and not only the hardships and economic difficulties, which makes them even poorer, which increases their desperation, if this were possible.

Our planet is at a crossroads¹³

At the dawn of the third millennium globalization can become a milestone in humanity's passage towards maturity, one it has never reached before. We feel the birth pangs of a new world struggling to be born.

But its birth requires a soul: love. As Pope John Paul II says, "Humanity is at a crossroads. Which civilization will dominate its future? Whether it will be a civilization of love or of incivility depends on us."

In my contacts with individuals and groups of every religion, race and culture, I have discovered that love is imprinted in the DNA of every human being. It is the most secure, fruitful and powerful force that can unite the entire human family. But it demands a total paradigm shift in our hearts, mentality and choices.

The need to reinterpret the meaning of reciprocity, a keystone in international relations, is already commonly felt in international life.

Now is the time for each nation to set its gaze ever further beyond its own boundaries and love other nations as its own. Reciprocity among peoples could then overcome the old and new logic of partisan tactics and profit making in order to establish relations with all. They will be based on the attitude that "the other" is "another self," part of the same humanity. Projects for disarmament, development and cooperation can be planned within this framework.

Such reciprocity can make all peoples, even the poorest, protagonists in international life, in the sharing of poverty and wealth, in the resolving of daily problems as well as emergencies. One's identity and every one's potential can flourish if they are put at the disposal of other nations and peoples, ever respectful of diversity and intent on furthering a spirit of reciprocal exchange.

If governments and we as individuals do our part, then yes, we can dream of composing a single planetary community. Is it a utopia? Jesus was the first to sow the seeds for globalization when he said, "May they all be one" (Jn 17:21). He also made us capable of a love that can bring unity to the human family while respecting the diversity of its members.

If we look around, we can see many models of this "new humanity" spread throughout the world. Has the time come for a planetary project?

¹³ From *Our planet is at a crossroads*, published in *Living City*, October 2001, Vol.40, No.10, p.5

From the city to the world¹⁴

Today history calls us to face great challenges. The current tensions that tear apart the work of all peoples place heavy demands on each one of us, both as individuals and in our associations, as well as in the political groups we belong to. We cannot evade such challenges whether we manage a small municipality or a metropolis, whether we participate in establishing the common good as active citizens or as competent scholars in the cultural sector, or whether we offer our personal commitment in institutions or in civil society. We cannot evade them if we want our political proposal to be able to present appropriate and efficient solutions, in line with our responsibilities, but especially in line with God's plan and therefore for the benefit of all.

The strong contradictions that mark our era need equally sharp and incisive guidelines of categories of thought and actions able to involve every single person, just like the peoples with their economic, social and political orders. ...

I am here to testify that what is impossible to isolated and divided people, becomes possible to those who have made fraternity, mutual understanding and unity the essential reason of their life.

These are certainly all the elements needed in order to begin a process that could mark history: a great idea, universal brotherhood; an environment where to implement it, the city; different institutional and social players whose unity is enriched and enhanced by the differences themselves; a project, the unity of Latin America to advance world unity.

If this takes place all will become possible! Despite the difficulties while keeping our eyes fixed on the goal, we could reconstruct the thousand tiles of reciprocity into one mosaic. This could be done starting from the aspect of our daily commitment up to the big political choices for our peoples. We will be able to achieve together a communitarian democracy, starting precisely from the Latin-American cities. New participation possibilities and a new willingness to listen in these cities will open up unexpected paths for the redemption of the least. We will learn how to spread economic cycles and institutions through the idea and especially through the practice of sharing goods freely. Starting from the foundation, from the city as the fundamental dimension of politics, we could provide useful experiences, projects and ideas also to renew world politics currently weakened by strong injustices. This shows that it is possible to establish unity in diversity, a shared political project while respecting pluralism and a global society made up of a thousand precious identities.

My wish is that the millenary wisdom of the indigenous peoples which is at the root of your history; the contribution of immigration that was able to express itself fully thanks to your hospitable societies; your measureless natural and especially cultural resources; your desire to find a balance between respect for nature and economic development; the fruitful democratic vitality of your

¹⁴ From *Message to the Convention of Latin American Mayors "City for Unity"* – Rosario (Argentina), 2-3 June 2005 (Translation from Italian text)

countries; that all these may find new expressions in fraternity and be a gift for the whole of humanity. ...

May God, Father of all peoples, support our work and bring it to fruition.

"God-given peace"¹⁵

For humanity to continue and for life to improve, we need to focus on peace, not just as one idea among many, but as a fundamental principle of human interactions, the primary law of the human family, without which it is not a family.

Today killings occur even in families; there are simply too many weapons available. Guns, missiles, even bombs are used too easily. And yet, our conscience tells us that arms should exist only for legitimate defence. They should never be used to kill children, women, the elderly, the defenceless! They should be used only in extreme necessity, in actual, not just possible circumstances, used like the surgeon's knife in an operation and never in order to impose one's own ideas or might.

A global authority

First, we need to return due credibility to the international organizations, so often held at bay. The war in Iraq has clearly demonstrated the need for a global authority capable of guiding international affairs, while respecting the prerogatives of each nation. How else can the current conflicts - those before our eyes daily, in the Middle East, for example, and those unfortunately forgotten—be resolved?

I remember the day after the terrible tragedy of September 11, 2001. The dominant response from political leaders was not threats of revenge, but appeals to join forces, not only to address the problems associated with terrorism, but also those caused by global injustices, and in this way find innovative solutions. They even spoke courageous words of self-criticism. But the reasons for war, the unilateral responses, plus the setting aside of both diplomacy and the role of international bodies, prevailed.

Today we need to re-activate that unified will and make it operational, giving each nation an equal voice in common decisions in order to find adequate solutions - and the solution should never be only war. This does not exclude the fact that one nation or another may play an influential role in resolving a difficult situation—but always and only respecting the norms of the international community, and as its spokesperson. Furthermore, new international entities could be created to meet such challenges.

The Second Vatican Council stated: "To keep violence once unleashed within limits, it is absolutely necessary for countries to cooperate more closely together, to organize together international bodies and to work tirelessly for the creation of organizations which will foster peace."

Social justice

¹⁵ From *Let's not give up on peace*, published in *Living City*, February 2004, Vol.43, No.2, pp.10-12

Secondly, I feel it is essential to bring about greater social justice in the world. Political leaders should work for true economic equity. It is a promise universally made at election time, but one needs to deliver on promises made. There is no time to waste in finding effective ways to reach an equal distribution of material goods and technological expertise. A few have much, while many are in need. We need to bring about change, even if slowly in order not to throw the global economy into turmoil.

Every effort should be made to eliminate the unbearable scandal of worldwide poverty also by investing in the development of local economies, as well as in education without which progress cannot be sustained.

A spiritual springtime

Then there is a third level of action. ... Christians number almost two billion. What witness are we giving to the world? We need to pursue an authentic spiritual life, which is the basis for peace and the global disarmament of hearts and armies. As I wrote the day after the Twin Towers fell, this will bring about a true revolution, that of giving God the first place in our life.

If we live like this, dialogue among the faithful of different religions is enormously facilitated—as I have experienced firsthand in many parts of the world. Religion is no longer used to foment violence, ... "appealing even to the most holy name of God in order to offend people," as the Pope said in Assisi on January 24, 2002.

God-given peace

... Let's not give up on the idea of peace! Unexpected moral thrusts and unthought-of energies have come out of even the most terrible wars. Divine Providence at times uses destructive situations, brought on by individual free choice, to spark new life. There are many signs that point to this. A concerted effort on the part of nations and entities is raising awareness of the urgent need to work together for the common good. This is occurring among nations, whether rich or poor, sophisticated or not in their armaments, aligned religiously or not, yet all daring to "invent a new peace." The era of the holy war is over. War is never holy, and it never was. God does not want it. Only peace is truly holy because God is peace. Let us pray unceasingly to God for the gift of peace.