

Article

Chiara Lubich and the Intercultural Dialogue—Educational Relevance in a Time of New Conflicts

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Abstract: As in a jigsaw puzzle, the pieces put together place before us the drama of the proliferation of new conflicts. Such are the times of today when people try to justify war on the grounds of belonging to different and incompatible cultures. Hence, there is an urgent need for a revival of intercultural dialogue and adequate education to foster it. Aware of the current challenge to peace, the two authors, who come from different geographical areas and cultures, seek through their research to highlight the educational value of Chiara Lubich’s charisma, her work and that of the Focolare Movement she founded. To this end, they make use of the hermeneutic method of “text” analysis, understood as everything the person said, did and wrote. For this, they focus on what, with respect to the epistemology of education, consists in the real innovation, namely: the Lubich *synoran*, the Golden Rule as the axiological foundation of intercultural dialogue education, the Art of Loving as a method and the Cube of Peace as a teaching tool.

Keywords: Chiara Lubich; intercultural dialogue; intercultural education; conflict



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1. Introduction

In spite of the mood of optimism and hope as we entered the 21st century (John Paul II 2001), with the attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001, humanity faced new challenges regarding peace, with obvious geopolitical, religious and cultural repercussions. The situation has become even more complex with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has engulfed the entire world, challenging the very depth of the meaning of human life. Moreover, with the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, in February 2022, the war in Europe, compounded by all the other wars around the world (Degl’Innocenti 2022)¹ highlighted the deep crisis that humanity is going through (John Paul II 1982, no. 8)². Therefore, there is an increasingly urgent need to look for paths to solutions especially of an educational nature, with the awareness that the education of the new generation is essential in order to change the world. With this conviction, in 2019, Pope Francis launched the Global Compact on Education, to “promote together and activate (...) those dynamics that give meaning to history and transform it in a positive way”. Involving in this “public figures who globally occupy positions of responsibility and care about the future of the new generations,” he also invited young people to “feel all the responsibility in building a better world” (Francis 2019).

What emerges from this context is the importance and urgency of intercultural dialogue, which we must be prepared for. An intercultural dialogue that becomes a way of life, reflected in communication between people of different cultures, and which includes the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

It is therefore, “a specific dialogue that flows from a certain premise that must be accepted—clearly or tacitly—by both parties: (...) we must look at each other from the outside, I with your eyes and you with mine, and in this conversation, we must compare

our perspectives. Only then are we able to find the answer to the question of what is really going on inside each of us" (Tischner 2018).

Various models of intercultural education have emerged for several years (Akkari and Radhouane 2022; Milan 2020; Korporowicz 2021; Nikitorowicz 2021; Morin 2020; Rembierz 2019; United Nations 2015; European Commission 2010; Lewowicki et al. 2003). Various organizations, communities, and movements such as, for example, the World Conference of Religions for Peace³; the Gandhian Shanti Ashram movement⁴; the Community of Sant'Egidio⁵ and the Focolare Movement, founded by Chiara Lubich (1920–2008) are also committed to promoting this dialogue.

Education for intercultural dialogue cannot prescind from a personalistic conception of man, whereby it is not primarily cultures that come into contact with each other, but people rooted in their historical and relational networks. In this perspective, the thought and the action of Lubich stand out in a particular way, which has been acknowledged by society, the political world and academia, including the world of education, as evidenced by the many awards attributed to her⁶. The very essence of Lubich's charism⁷ and her work lies in love, which has as its consequence unity⁸.

From this charism springs a particular pedagogical proposal, which, however, has not yet found a wider and more appropriate development. Indeed, there are publications in different languages dedicated to various issues. For example, in Italian (Snoj and De Beni 2021; De Beni 2013; Siniscalco 2019; Morán Cepedano 2019; Boi 2017a, 2017b; Milan 2021; Fiorin 2019; Vončina 2013; Zani 2010), Spanish (Gatti 2019; Nin Márquez and Rossa 2019; Tapia 2019), Portuguese (Dantas 2015, 2014), German (Scheidler 2019; Hechenberger 2007), Polish (Kozubek 2019, 2016, 2014, 2015, 2012b; Kornas-Biela 2013), English (Tin Huang 2019; Arxer 2017; Ramer et al. 2014; Michael et al. 2010), Croatian (De Beni et al. 2012). It should be pointed out that despite Lubich's rich experience of intercultural dialogue and her dedication to forming people to it, there is a noticeable absence of an elaboration on Lubich's⁹ intercultural dialogue. This article aims to fill this particular gap, with a view to identifying its educational value for the times of new conflicts. So, in this reflection the question concerns, the hermeneutic question: in times of new conflicts what educational relevance does the intercultural dialogue undertaken by Lubich have? The answer is to be sought in her "texts," assuming that the term "text" can mean not only a word, a symbol, a myth, but also "faith [...], human behavior, events, social reality" (Galarowicz 1992, p. 43). In such an approach, hermeneutics itself is understood as a method, that describes and interprets the entire human world read as a "text" (Gadamer 1972; Ricoeur 2021). In our adopted approach, therefore, the focus is first on Lubich's life and work, in favor of the intercultural dialogue, and then on her educational proposal, regarding intercultural dialogue.

2. Intercultural Dialogue from Chiara Lubich's Perspective

Keeping in mind the scope and purpose of this publication, it is necessary to draw on Lubich's biography¹⁰ (Carella 2014; Gallagher 1997; Lubich and Zambonini 1992; Robertson 1978), sources of "her" intercultural dialogue.

2.1. Chiara Lubich—The Profile

Silvia Maria Elvira Lubich is the given name at the Registry Office of the woman who is more widely known as Chiara Lubich. She was born in Trent, a frontier, on 22 January 1920, just after the First World War, and during the transition of the city of Trent from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the Kingdom of Italy. Her contemporaries include philosophers Martin Buber, Emmanuel Mounier, Edith Stein, Simone Weil and educationalists—Maria Montessori and Paulo Freire. Lubich's interlocutors within the Catholic Church include Paul VI and John Paul II. In the ecumenical and interreligious sphere, significant for intercultural dialogue, her relationship with Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I, Evangelical Pastor Klaus Hess, Rev. Nikkyō Niwano, one of the founders and first president of the Risshō Kōsei-kai Buddhist movement in Japan, Imam W. Deen Mohammed, an African

American leader in the United States of America, Sureshchandra Upadhyaya, an Indian lecturer and scholar with deep knowledge of the Hindu culture, and many others. Finally, her collaborators include the intellectuals Igino Giordani, Pasquale Foresi and Klaus Hemmerle.

From Lubich's earliest teaching experiences (Lubich and Giordani 2007, p. 51; Fondi and Zanzucchi 2003, pp. 46–47; Del Nero 2021, pp. 137–48), what emerges from the testimony of the pupils themselves, is the same disposition to love—the same attitude she had in all her relationships, throughout her life, whereby her commitment did not take the form of just teaching individual school subjects, but had a genuine educational scope, meaning education in its original meaning of accompanying or leading. The experiences of her students are significant. The teacher respected the persona of the child, she focused on the life of God in the persona of the child, in front of every doubt she wanted to know first of all the thought of the student. From various other testimonies it appears that Lubich was characterized for her simplicity of relationship and communication, her love towards everyone, her concern for each student to the extent of bringing everyone up to the same level, without preferential treatment. She had a very motherly attitude in understanding someone's problems, and being close to that student at difficult times, encouraging the student with kind words, and in sharing knowledge with gentleness, when it came to correcting the student. Lubich fostered a deep respect for the child's persona and their conscience, the search for truth, and the spirit of collaboration without moralizing (De Beni 2021, in Snoj and De Beni 2021, pp. 255–63; De Beni 2013; Zanzucchi 2001).

A significant anthropological, as well as spiritual, consequence for Lubich was what the director of the Franciscan Third Order told her: "Remember, young lady, that God loves you immensely". —this, Silvia consecrated herself in the Third Order taking the name Chiara¹¹ (Lubich 2006, p. 39) and was subsequently made novice mistress (Giordani 2015, p. 141). 7 December 1943 is regarded as the founding date of the Focolare Movement (FM). In the late 1940s, Lubich moved to Rome where she dedicated herself completely to the FM, which gradually expanded in Italy and beyond. This required discernment and effective guidelines for its implementation. The perspective is that of Christian humanism at its root, namely the event of the Son of Man who is the Son of God (Coda 2020)¹², the root of the "mysticism of encounter" (Francis 2014c, no. 2). Lubich will say in an almost poetic narrative:

By allowing God to live in me, and by letting him love himself in my neighbors, he would discover himself in many. Many eyes would then shine with his light, giving a tangible sign that he reigns there. [. . .] We need to bring God back to life in us, then keep him alive, and therefore overflow him onto others like bursts of Life. [. . .] And we need to keep him alive among us by loving one another. [. . .] Then everything changes, politics and art, education and religion, private life and recreation. (Lubich et al. 2002, p. 101).

It is the pivotal point from which all the dialogues flow. Dialogue that over the years has been growing always more in concentric circles, in the perspective indicated by Pope Paul VI in the Encyclical Letter '*Ecclesiam suam*' and ratified by the Second Vatican Council (Siniscalco and Toscani 2015).

2.2. Focolare Movement—An Intercultural Event

Also participating in Lubich's intercultural dialogue is the FM, which, in its structure and actions, represents a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious reality. Spread all over the world, in various geographical and cultural latitudes, it has involved persons from many Christian churches, and from the major religions¹³ (Cocchiaro 2006; Mesli and Mokrani 2020), from nonreligious beliefs and from many cultures. It involved persons of various generations, state of life, social status, etc. (Fondi and Zanzucchi 2003; Callebaut 2017). This meant, for Lubich and the FM members, openness to alterity at the cultural and religious level, an openness that determined the transmission of the charism in the

form of dialogue. So also in the context of intercultural education, one can understand the expression with which Lubich describes the Movement, as “one continuous extraordinary educational event” (Lubich 2007a, p. 219).

Convinced that one does not love or value what one does not know, in her role as founder and president of a Christian movement (*Pontificium Consilium Pro Laicis* 2008) that aims at unity, the commitment was to bring people into relationship with one another and, therefore, to help them know one another, and therefore this committed everyone to know themselves for who they are. Lubich thus explains her anthropological underpinning vision of the human person, in her attitude of dialogue: “I (the Idea of me) is ‘ab aeterno’ in the Mind of God, in the Word; therefore ‘ab aeterno’ I am loved by the Father and ‘ab aeterno’ I hold the place that the Father has assigned to me. And I am I Up There, that is, my true self: Christ in me”. (Lubich 1949 in: Tobler and Povilus 2021, p. 46). And further on, she continues:

And I see how “ab aeterno” was my being in the Being and the idea of me (Word of God) in the Word, my life in the Life. And God pronounced me to be from Himself, as He pronounced “ab aeterno” His Son, for seeing me in Himself He loved me and gave me life by moulding me with the Holy Spirit. And “ab aeterno” saw my beginning in Him (where my end already was) while for me the beginning and end are distinct. I was “ab aeterno” in Him and He in eternity and He in eternity I will be. (Lubich 1949 in: Zanghi 2008, p. 75)

This vision of the person is reflected in all her relationships.

2.3. *The Sense and Meaning of the Intercultural Dialogue*

In Catholic circles at the official level, dialogue has been talked about especially since the time of the Second Vatican Council. However, the practice of dialogue goes back much earlier, with the birth, for example, of the ecumenical movement¹⁴, as a result of the experience of World War II, the Holocaust and, finally, the Cold War. All this indicated the presence of a common feeling of many, that this is the hour of dialogue, a dialogue warranted by the centrality of love (Lubich 2007a, pp. 112, 139)¹⁵.

From her intimate dialogue with God, drawing light and strength also regarding the status of women, Lubich becomes a forerunner in a culturally male world¹⁶ (Lubich 1988; Lubich 1993, pp. 149–66; Lubich 1995, pp. 5–12). At the same time, she recognizes that the experience of Jesus Forsaken, (see Mk. 15:34) “is the key to open every dialogue, to arrive at having unity”. (Lubich 2022, p. 509).

For her, the dynamic of dialogue lies in “putting oneself at the same level as the other person: not considering oneself better than others. It also means listening to what is in the heart of the other person. It means putting aside all of our [. . .] thoughts, feelings and attachments. Putting aside everything to be able to ‘enter into the other’, so to speak” (Lubich 2000, p. 14). There is a particularly significant text of hers in which she explains the meaning and foundation of all dialogue: “This is the great attraction of modern times: to penetrate to the highest contemplation while mingling with everyone, one person alongside others, (...) to embroider patterns of light on the crowd, and at the same time to share with our neighbor shame, hunger, troubles, brief joys” (Lubich 2007a, p. 169). This led her to develop over time the idea of the dialogue of life (Lubich 2020a, p. 448), a relationship based on actions rather than words (Lubich and Zambonini 1992, p. 98), and the dialogue of the people (Lubich 2020a, p. 566).

2.4. *Characteristics of the Intercultural Experience*

From Lubich’s concept of relationship with the other, emerges the principle that every person is “a candidate for unity” (Lubich 1982 in: Lubich 1997, p. 23). She deduces this from the Gospel message on love of neighbor (Jn. 13:34). In this perspective, she launches a precise style of behavior defined by the expression—to make oneself one (1 Cor. 9:19–23) which “demands that love is ‘a nothingness of oneself’, which knows how to open oneself completely to the other, to enter into the skin of the other, to see the world as the other sees

it" (Whaling 1986, pp. 130–31; Lubich 2020a, p. 517). It is precisely such love that brings her closer (a) to the various persons, communities and movements within the Catholic Church, and to (b) Christians of different Churches, (c) to followers of other religions, (d) to people who have non-religious convictions, (e) and in the various spheres of culture. In fact, based on her own experience, and that of the members of the FM, Lubich defines dialogue—unfolded in five areas—as the way to achieve the aims of the FM (Lubich 2008, art. 6; 2018, pp. 107–44).

The Catholic Church presents itself for Lubich as a privileged sphere “to work for an ever-deeper unity among the faithful of the Catholic Church, as well as with ecclesiastical institutions, associations, groups and movements, born from new and old charisms [...], so as to increase communion among all, at every level” (Lubich 2008, art. 6a)¹⁷. From the analysis made of this first dialogue, it appears that the FM is committed to several collaborative projects in the social and cultural spheres spread throughout the world¹⁸.

Regarding the ecumenical dialogue, it is noted that in the first period of her history, Lubich, immersed in the pre-conciliar Church, presents herself as a child of the age, when she explains that she and the first generation of the FM knew nothing about ecumenism, and were convinced that this charism was intended only for the Catholic Church (Lubich 1989, p. 18).

Yet, her anthropological conception, in which the importance of openness and esteem toward every person is emphasized, leads her to get to know Christians of various denominations (Lubich 2020b; Back 1988). Lubich thus becomes a protagonist of the Catholic Church’s relationship with Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I (Paliotti 2013, p. 103; Back 1988)¹⁹. She defined this ecumenical experience of hers and the FM as a “dialogue of life” (Lubich 2007b), having as its basis the principle of mutual love and as its purpose, witnessing to the unity of the Churches. Over the years, she specifies that the goal of the FM is “to establish relationships of fraternal communion and common witness with Christians of other Churches and ecclesial communities, as a contribution to the restoration of a full and visible communion” (Lubich 2008, art. 6b)²⁰.

Lubich’s interreligious dialogue has its origin in her experience with the Traditional African Religion, in Cameroon, dating back to the 1960s (Zanzucchi 2002). The ongoing relationship with the Great Religions began with the 1977 Templeton Award ceremony in London. A number of leaders in attendance—Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs—expressed a desire to establish contact with her. For Lubich, this was a sign that the FM should also go out toward the followers of other religions: “We were, in fact, and are convinced that we are called to help build universal brotherhood with all of them, basing ourselves above all on those principles, those values that we have in common” (Lubich 2020a, p. 540)²¹. An analysis of the experience of her interreligious dialogue, shows that the basis of her relationships with persons of other religions has always been the affirmation of common values, communication and transmission of spiritual experiences (Catalano 2010, 2022; Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Focolare Movement 2017). The interreligious dialogue that emerges rests on the “Seeds of the Word” present in the various religions (John Paul II 1979, no. 11). This is demonstrated by the concrete effects of Lubich’s contacts with leaders and communities of the Great Religions and religious Traditions: Buddhists (Lubich 1981 in: Fondi 1986, pp. 18–25; Coda 1997b, pp. 32–36, 50–51)²², Jews (Lubich 1997 in: Gillet and Parlapiano 2016, p. 123)²³, Muslims (Lubich 1997 in: Coda 1997a, p. 33n)²⁴, Hindus (K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham and The Centre for Interfaith Dialogue of de Focolare Movement 2003; Focolare Movement et al. 2004)²⁵, and, in addition, the fact that in 1994 she became honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). This interreligious experience of hers and of the FM, takes on the shape of a dialogue of life, born out of daily contacts (Lubich 2007a, pp. 325–33), of dialogue in cooperation with various international and interreligious organizations²⁶; dialogue with experts of various traditions and religions; and dialogue of lived spiritual experiences in daily life, in the light of the holy books and traditions of individual religions.

Another area of Lubich's intercultural experience concerns people—namely, “friends”—who have no religious faith reference. Notwithstanding the fact that she came from a family in which her father was a socialist, and her older brother a communist, as a Catholic and as a founder of an ecclesial movement, she could not help but be somewhat involved in the prevailing mood in Italy, especially in the post-war period, with regard to the threat of communism and atheism. With the coming of the Second Vatican Council, and the openness of the Catholic Church to dialogue, she regained her earlier disposition and, through being careful with regard to contemporary culture, she embarked on dialogue and collaboration with persons of non-religious convictions, as written in the General Statutes, that is, in the commitment “to love and to dialogue with people who believe in and practice the great human/Christian values of social justice, freedom, solidarity, peace, etc., basing this on the fullest respect toward those with no particular religious affiliation: this is meant to be a contribution to the unity of the human family” (Lubich 2008, art. 6d; Dal Rì 1996).

Lastly, Lubich together with the FM is committed “to dialogue with modern day culture and its human realities so as to permeate them with Christian wisdom” (Lubich 2008, art. 6e). These are the so-called “inundations”²⁷, namely doctrinal streams arising from the encounter of the movement's own charism with culture, the different disciplines and human realities, present in the FM since the 1950s of the twentieth century, revised and actualized in light of the honorary doctorates awarded to Lubich, and her trip to Argentina and Brazil in May 1998. Emerging from these have been particular realities, which brought together experts from different disciplines and cultural areas which have assumed the names of, Economy of Communion (EoC); Political Movement for Unity (MPPU), and others (Kozubek 2015, pp. 79–108).

2.5. Chiara Lubich's *Synoran*—A World in Color

The overall vision, the art of looking towards a certain direction, together in unity, that is, from a common perspective, which was typical of Chiara Lubich, could be defined as her own *synoran*²⁸. In Lubich, the perspective is that of the Light, which is Love, which is like the natural light that illuminates everything, and is refracted into all seven shades of the rainbow: an intuition she had when looking at the personality of each of her first companions (Lubich 2015, pp. 131–133). These colors, represent the dimensions of life seen in an integral way, that, once understood, oriented the life of the FM: as the following: (1) communion of goods, economy and work; (2) witness and radiation; (3) spirituality and prayer life; (4) health and physical life; (5) harmony and the environment; (6) wisdom and study; and (7) unity and means of communication (Lubich 1999, pp. 73–83).

Looking at her own cross-cultural experience, in 1969 Lubich applied the concept of these seven dimensions to the whole of humanity, attributing each one to the geographical area of the world, corresponding to the typical characteristics of its broader culture. Therefore: North America and Oceania—communion of goods, economy and work (red color); Africa—witness and irradiation²⁹ (orange color); Asia—spirituality and prayer life (yellow color); Middle East and North Africa—health and physical life (green color); Latin America—harmony and environment³⁰ (blue color); Western Europe—wisdom and study (indigo color); Eastern Europe—unity and means of communication (violet color). Such a vision described as “a World in Color”, Lubich proposed to the youth of the FM (Lubich 1998, pp. 115–25), while to adolescents she addresses the invitation to be “world-people,” that is, persons who love all of humanity (Lubich 1999, pp. 35–36)³¹. She explains this idea like this, “When we are born (...) we became members not only of a family, but of a city, of a people, of all humanity. We must feel that we are members of this family, of humanity” (Lubich 1979, p. 146). Therefore, a world-man and world-woman is someone who goes beyond the limits of their own culture, and to open up and love the country of the other, the culture, and their religion as their own (Lubich 1999, pp. 73–82). Lubich makes a reference here, of a theological character, and the experience of Jesus' abandonment, who no longer feels God's presence ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?’ (Mk. 15:34). For Lubich, “It is Jesus Forsaken (...) who is the trusted leader for every young person of

this century. He, the Beloved, offers to those who follow Him—the spirit of truth. (...) By following him, they will find the strength not to tremble in front of any situation but, on the contrary, to face it in the certainty that all human truth in and of the Truth, that is, the Kingdom of God, will find, also by their contribution, a new worldwide mentality—the new paradigms—we would say today (A/N)—at the world level” (Lubich 1999, pp. 82–83).

A few decades later, in fidelity to that original intuition, and in explicit reference to John Paul II—who drew a comparison between “the dark night” of St. John of the Cross and the darkness of our time (Giovanni Paolo II 1989), Lubich speaks of a response to that, through her charisma and her movement, to the collective and cultural night (Lubich 2006 in: Centri delle Volontarie e dei Volontari 2007, pp. 154–59). So, this *synoran* can be attributed to interculturality in her, her understanding of interculturality, her proposal for intercultural dialogue, and the pedagogy of intercultural dialogue itself.

Chiara Lubich’s experience of intercultural dialogue and the Focolare Movement, have a special educational relevance particularly in the time of new conflicts.

3. Chiara Lubich’s Inspirations for Intercultural Education in Times of New Conflicts

The third decade of the 21st century looks like “the Third World War ‘in bits and pieces’” (Francis 2014a). The new conflicts, but especially the war in Ukraine, which was invaded by Russia, appear as a defeat of humanity. Pope Francis states that every war “is born in the heart of man from selfishness and pride, from hatred that induces destruction, to locking the other up in a negative image, to exclude and eliminate the other”. Indeed, war reveals itself as “a fratricide that destroys the very design of brotherhood, inscribed in the vocation of the human family” (Francesco 2022, p. 38–39). A conflict, a war, often begins “with intolerance towards the differences in the other, which fuels the urge to possess and the will to dominate” (ibid. p. 39). Therefore, there is an urgent need for a basic formation, based on common values, to foster respect for the other person, and to raise awareness of brotherhood. From Chiara Lubich’s experience some pedagogical lines emerge that can be applied to education for intercultural dialogue, which has as its goal, the peace of the human family. These are: The Golden Rule, which is seen as an axiological basis, the Art of Loving, which can be considered as an educational method as well as an end, and the Cube of Peace, as a teaching tool (Catalano and Bass 2022; Milan 2021; Kozubek 2012a).

3.1. The Golden Rule as an Axiological Foundation

Peace education requires an ethical and moral choice that goes beyond a purely faith-based approach, calling all people of goodwill³² to shared responsibility. Lubich, in educating the FM children and youth about universal brotherhood, referred not only to the Christian principle of love of neighbor but also to the Golden Rule (Lubich 1993, p. 45). This rule goes back to ancient times, formulated then in two ways: on the negative side, “Do not do to others what is displeasing to you”, and on the positive side, “Do that which you want others to do to you”³³. It thus stimulates the rule, to avoid evil, and encourages one to sow the seeds of good, to act, to take the initiative and see the needs of the other person. It is the law written on the human heart; this is something we can all agree on, so that when we address other issues, we can do it in a positive and constructive way for the entire human community (Benedict XVI 2008). An attitude that is based on avoiding evil and generating good, uncovers and develops in the person esteem for the other, and moves the dynamic of reciprocity-as an axiological basis, fundamental to intercultural competence. (Kozubek 2012a, 2012c; Vigna and Zanardo 2005).

The message of the Golden Rule is found in the teachings of various religions (Rosik 2006). In Christianity, as a moral norm it recommends, “Whatever you want others to do to you, do it to them”. (Mt. 7, 12: Lk. 6, 31)³⁴. In Judaism and in the great rabbinic tradition, the fundamental basis of such a rule is emphasized, and that is charity as the “main law of the Torah” (Rabbi Akiba be Josef), because if God created man in His own image, then when something is done for any person, it is as if it were done for God Himself. Rabbi Hiller explains it, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor” (Talmud, Shabbad

31 in: [Vigna and Zanardo 2005](#), p. 20). In the Islamic tradition, similar to the Golden Rule, are the words quoted by Al-Bukhari: “None of you truly believes until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself” (Hadith 13 in: [Vigna and Zanardo](#), p. 38). In Hinduism it is recommended, “This is the essence of duty: do nothing for others, which, if done to you, would cause you pain; this is the summation of duty” (Mahabharata 5: 1517). Mahatma Gandhi said, “You and I are one and the same thing. I cannot hurt you without harming myself” ([Mühs 1996](#), p. 82). In Buddhism, this principle is expressed in the phrase, “Do not treat others in a way that you would find hurtful toward yourself” (Udana—warga 5:18). In Confucianism, the Golden Rule emphasizes self-love and generosity toward others. Confucius wrote, “In your relationship with others, do your best and treat them as you would like to be treated, and you will find that this is the shortest path to generosity”. (Mencius, VII. A. 4 in: [Vigna and Zanardo 2005](#), p. 584).

To this richness, contained in the various religions, Lubich addresses the young people of various religions, and points out to them that “all these phrases mean: respect and love your neighbor,” and points out that it is a special love: “Certainly not with that addressed only to one’s own family or friends, but love towards everyone: the likeable or unlikeable, poor or rich, small or great, whether of your homeland or another, friend or foe . . . Towards everyone”. Therefore, she encourages them to continue to pursue peace by explaining, “If you, a Muslim young person, love; and if you, a Christian, love; and if you, a Hindu, love, you will certainly come to the point of loving one another. Therefore, it would be so for everyone. And here and now, we would find we have built one piece of universal brotherhood” ([Lubich 2007a](#), p. 368).

Analyzing various speeches by Lubich addressed to adolescents and young people at public events, at first glance one might get the impression of an idealistic narrative; however, delving into her conversations with them, one discovers rich material of a pedagogical nature. For example, regarding her invitation to base one’s relationship with others, on the principle value of love, Lubich makes very concrete suggestions, such as the ‘Art of Loving’.

3.2. *The Art of Loving as a Method*

The Art of Loving is the title of a work by Erich Fromm. According to him:

Our civilization very rarely seeks to learn the art of loving; despite its desperate search for love, since everything else is considered to be more important: success, prestige, money and power. We use almost all our energy in pursuit of these goals, and almost none in learning the *art of loving*.

([Fromm 1956](#))³⁵

Lubich’s reference to the Art of Loving, does not relate directly to Fromm, although she herself has referred several times since 1999 to this philosopher, highlighting his thought. The Art of Loving in Lubich ([Lubich 2005](#)) is recognized as an educational method, representing a way to arrive at an ethical and social maturity ([Cataldi and Iorio 2022](#); [Kozubek 2019](#)). It takes the form of some precise points that instruct one to: love everyone, love first, make yourself one, love concretely, love one another, love as one would like to be loved. These are behaviors that are the foundation of universal brotherhood, oriented towards the good of the other, devoid of selfishness, and which foster the rise of reciprocating personalities ([Silva 2021](#)). Their practice lies at the foundation of interpersonal education because they lead to dialogue, cooperation and unity, while safeguarding one’s identity ([Nin Márquez and Rossa 2019](#), p. 413). Lubich emphasizes that the love spoken of in the Art of Loving has particular requirements, which is why it is called a kind of ‘art’ ([Pastiaux and Pastiaux 1997](#), p. 4). Indeed, Giovanni D’Alessandro notes that Lubich “is well aware that the implementation of those guidelines requires time, practice, a trying and retrying approach, as is proper to what is called art, in the sense of a craft. And anyone can learn it, only if they want to” (D’Alessandro in: [Lubich 2005](#), p. 16; [Kozubek 2016](#), pp. 113–21). The essential requirements of this art are: universality-because it demands loving everyone, even enemies; concreteness-because it calls us to love through deeds, and

not only emotionally or through words; and reciprocity—because it is necessary to love in such a way so as to inspire in the other, the capacity to love (Lubich 2001 in: [Dal Rì and Diana 2001](#), p. 25).

In the Art of Loving, Lubich brings out a certain dialogue of love, one that Christianity teaches and which consists in making a gift of oneself to another³⁶. She says,

I felt that I have been created as a gift for the one next to me. (. . .) On earth, all is in relationship of love with all: each thing with each thing. It is necessary to be Love to find the thread of gold among beings. (Lubich 1949 in: [Tobler and Povilus 2021](#), p. 64, n. 18)

Therein lies universality and concreteness, in the sense that it concerns every person and all people concretely. Such an attitude generally requires reciprocity, which is a necessary condition for achieving unity. The Art of Loving assists people in the process of their personalization. It teaches one to be responsible for oneself, for others, have concern for the common good, and show reciprocity in loving. Its universality lies in the fact that it can be applied at different stages of human development, and in various cultural contexts. In fact, Lubich proposed the Art of Loving even in secular spheres ([Lubich 2020a](#), pp. 39, 511–19, 552–64).

3.3. *The Cube of Peace as a Tool*

A playful and educational tool that helps develop the skills required by the Art of Loving is the Cube of Love. It is intended for families, schools and groups of all kinds. It was developed by Roseli Weber, a special educator for children with psychological disorders, who first applied it in 1997 to a group of children and preadolescents in Switzerland ([Arxer 2017](#), p. 2). On each side of the cube, instead of numbers, is written one of the principles of the Art of Loving, thus: I am the first to love; I love everybody; I love the other person; I listen to the other person; we forgive one another; we love each other.

Through a proposed game, one is invited to throw the cube every day, or every week and, thus, implement the phrase that comes up. As Teresa Boi observes, “In the cube game, rules are easily obeyed because they are not perceived as imposed, but as necessary for the smooth running of the activity. Even the opponent, the enemy, takes on a different guise as an indispensable component in the implementation of the game itself. Without their participation, the possibility of playing vanishes”. ([Boi 2017b](#), p. 3; [Bolkart and Heinsdorff 2011](#)).

In the multicultural context, two adaptations of the cube have a particular educational value: The Cube of Peace and the Interreligious Cube of Peace. The Cube of Peace invites people to acquire the attitudes that help create and promote peace, in concrete ways. The children’s version—the Children’s Cube for Peace—is adapted to the intellectual and emotional capacities of childhood and therefore, accompanied by various drawings. It proposes: Say beautiful things; Help; Love each other very much; Be friends with everyone; Share; Comfort someone.

The Interreligious Cube, on the other hand, features on its different sides, the Golden Rule—“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and the symbols of the five religions accompanied by the phrases that invite one to build the relationships of mutual esteem based on brotherly love. Thus, one finds: Christianity—“Love one another with brotherly love” Romans 12:10, Judaism—“Turn away from evil and do good, seek peace and run after it” Psalm 32:14; Islam—“First choose to forgive and then prescribe to do good” Quran, 7:199; Buddhism—“Listen with compassion and speak with love” Thich Naht Hanh; Hinduism—“Be the change you want to see in the world” Gandhi.

The value of the cube teaching lies in promoting positive relational experiences among peers and nonpeers; to experience fraternal relationships, in order to promote them in other situations and respond to a self-centered, individualistic and indifferent culture, with a proposal that values the other and the relational and plural dimension of personal growth, enhances children’s pro-social skills, and promotes a positive climate, in the various environments that adopt the cube.

4. Conclusions

This paper is intended to answer the question regarding Chiara Lubich's particular intercultural dialogue, and its corresponding educational value, for the times of new conflicts, in the third decade of the 21st century.

First, we need to emphasize that Lubich's thinking about dialogue, matured throughout her life, which she lived in various ecclesial, social and cultural contexts. While the dialogical dimension was developing in the post-war society, including the use of dialogical philosophy, Lubich experienced that her charism of unity was particularly suited for dialogue. Thus, dialogue within the Catholic Church with various movements, organizations and charisms, thereafter-ecumenical dialogue, interreligious dialogue, dialogue with people of non-religious convictions and, finally, dialogue with the world of culture in its various dimensions. Therefore, her synoran widened always more, in the perspective of universal brotherhood and, concretely, of the "world in color," that is, of unity in diversity and therefore interculturality.

The Focolare Movement, which she founded, presents itself as a forum for dialogue because of the multicultural background of its members, and its presence in various geographical areas, especially in areas of conflict and war. According to Lubich, one had to be properly prepared for this dialogue. Hence, the need for the development of scholarly thinking, and effective formation of the Movement's members.

It follows from Lubich's thought that in dialoguing, it is a matter of aiming at the centrality of the human person, and of developing love—inscribed in its very nature—as the universal ethical basis, in the form of the Golden Rule. This is the axiological basis, from which flows out a specific Lubich method that is called the Art of Loving, and a teaching tool, which is the Cube of Love, in the version of the Cube of Peace.

Ongoing wars and the eventual underlying latent conflicts, demand a special educational response, preferably of a preventive nature. The Golden Rule, the Art of Loving and the Cube of Peace, can contribute to a particular concept of intercultural dialogue education. So, from this concept results an additional value, that is a certain innovation as far as intercultural education is concerned. This is what the educational value of Lubich's intercultural dialogue consists of.

As can be deduced from the bibliography itself, such an educational proposal still needs a critical academic approach that goes beyond mere dissemination. There are the "sources," the acts of conferences, articles, essays, and the different versions of the Cube of Love. This entire documented heritage can serve as a basis for new scientific research, in the perspective of not only interculturalism but also transculturalism.

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Notes

- 1 They speak of 59 wars, among which are Afghanistan, Myanmar, Yemen, Tigray.
- 2 Resonating in the mind are the prophetic words of Pope John Paul II. “Even modern man, despite his achievements, touches in his personal and collective experience the abyss of abandonment, the temptation of nihilism, the absurdity of so much physical, moral and spiritual suffering. The dark night, the trial that makes one experience the very mystery of evil and demands an openness to faith, sometimes acquires epoch-like dimensions and collective proportions”.
- 3 The World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), or simply called, Religions for Peace, is an international organization of representatives of the world’s major religious traditions, founded in 1967, who meet to study and act on global issues affecting peace, justice and human survival. WCRP has consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and observer status at UNESCO. (Rossano 1999; John Paul II 1994).
- 4 This is a peace workshop in the spirit of Gandhi, with businesses, schools and paths for interreligious dialogue, founded in the mid-1980s by Dr. Aram and his family near Coimbatore, India. (Machado 2020).
- 5 It was founded in Italy in 1968, following the Second Vatican Council, at the initiative of Andrea Riccardi, and has spread to more than 70 countries on several continents. Its goals include pursuing peace and cooperation among peoples through solidarity and humanitarian aid to civilian populations suffering from war. From 1987 onward, Sant’Egidio has been committed internationally and at the grassroots level to continue in meetings, gatherings and prayer, the so-called “spirit of Assisi”. (Sant’Egidio 2021; Riccardi 2018).
- 6 Lubich has received sixty-two various awards and honors in various cultural and religious fields, including the Templeton Prize for the Advancement of Religion (London 1977; see: Lubich 2020a, pp. 187–95), the Council of Europe’s European Human Rights Award (Strasbourg 1998; see: Lubich 2020a, pp. 56–58), the Olive Tree for Peace, from the Jewish Community of Rome (1995; see: Maltese 2020), the Peace Education Award, from UNESCO (Paris 1996; see: Lubich 2020a, pp. 39–43), the title of “Mafua Ndem” (Queen sent by God), from the Fon of Fontem (Cameroun 2000; see: Lubich 2020a, pp. 520–24), and “Defender of Peace,” from Shanti Ashram and Sarvodaya (Coimbatore, India 2001; see: Lubich 2020a, pp. 533–42).
- 7 “In common parlance, when a ‘charism’ is spoken of, it often means a talent, a natural ability. [. . .] In the Christian perspective, however, a charism is much more than a personal quality, a predisposition that one can be endowed with: a charism is a *grace, a gift bestowed by God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit*. Additionally, it is a gift which is given to someone not because he is better than others or because he deserves it: it is a gift that God gives him, because with his freely given love he can place him *in service to the entire community, for the good of all*”. (Francis 2014b).
- 8 “Love” and “unity,” two terms referring to the teachings of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels: “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn. 13:34); “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us one, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn. 17:21). The theological meaning of unity elicits its anthropological meaning. Ellero Babini explains that it is the “first ‘vertical’ unity, which invites man to look upward, toward God, where the beginning and source of ‘horizontal’ interpersonal unity is found”. (Babini 1988, p. 132). Lubich explains that for unity within the diversity of community, the model is that of the unity of the Holy Trinity. This is expressed in the Statutes of the Work of Mary: “Mutual and continuous charity, which makes unity possible and leads to the presence of Jesus in the community, is for the people who are part of the Work of Mary the basis of their life in every aspect: it is the norm of norms, the premise of every other rule”. (Lubich 2008, p. 7).
- 9 There are different elaborations regarding Lubich’s interreligious dialogue (Catalano 2022; Callebaut 2021).
- 10 General Archives of the Focolare Movement (AGMF)-recognized by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities of the Italian Republic and the Italian Bishops’ Conference (CEI)-within which are the Chiara Lubich Archives (ACL) and the St. Chiara Media Center (CSC); Center for Interdisciplinary Studies Abba School; Chiara Lubich Center, responsible for copyright and, in addition, dedicated to the research and dissemination of her thought (<https://chiaralubich.org/en/>) (accessed on 10 september 2022).
- 11 Referring to Chiara of Assisi (1194–1253); in the Christian context this refers to consecration, or the dedication of one’s life to God.
- 12 Piero Coda points out, “A paradox that does not simply sugar-coat the person with a coating of intangible super naturalness, but defines the extraordinary event of humanism that the Person that Jesus Himself is. The interiority of the soul, the root of Christian humanism, is revealed in the flesh of Jesus, the Son of God who became the Son of Man. That flesh, which cries out from the Cross on behalf of us all, and which, by opening wide the interiority of Jesus’ soul to the Father’s boundless love, opens it wide to the whole world. By dilating the interiority of the self into the exteriority of the encounter with the flesh of every neighbor: as a you who is also a self, kissed by the Father’s love”. (Coda 2020, p. 61).
- 13 A typical example is the FM community in Algeria, which is mostly made up of Muslims.
- 14 This is the path of dialogue for unity undertaken by the Christian churches, which originated in Protestant circles but has involved the Christian world at large. Over the years, it has given rise to the Ecumenical Council of Churches, based in Geneva. Cf. The World Council of Churches www.oikoumene.org. (accessed on 10 September 2022).
- 15 Lubich is inspired by the Mother of Jesus, Mary of Nazareth, who emphasizes the fundamental aspect of love that makes contact and dialogue with the world possible. Indeed, she says, “I would like to know how to be alone with God as she was, in the sense

that, although among brothers and sisters, I feel compelled to make all of my life an intimate dialogue between my soul and God”.

- 16 There is a lack of sufficient in-depth and significant studies on her contribution to women’s freedom, to the recognition of their true dignity and, therefore, to an advancement of intercultural dialogue on this point. What is noticeable is that she played an important and significant role. The charism of unity has always merited the adherence of a predominantly female majority, not in the sense of a feminist ideology, but of putting women in their place in the family as well as in society. It could be said that there has been a re-education of those who have come under its influence, men and women, believers or not, of any ethnic group or culture. In this sense, the publication of John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris dignitatem*, on the dignity and vocation of women (John Paul II 1988), was the occasion for an explanation of the concrete contribution of the charism of unity. Lubich’s action becomes all the more significant the more we bear in mind the culturally incisive role of that universe of women constituted by some of her contemporaries, from Edith Stein to Martha C. Nussbaum, moving to Simone Weil, Wanda Póltawska, María Zambrano, etc. These are all people with great cultural depth.
- 17 Lubich expressed this before John Paul II during the first congress of movements and new communities, held at the Vatican on 30 May 1998. During 2000, she was invited by the Polish ecclesial movement Luce-Vita, and participated in their respective congress held in Czestochowa.
- 18 For example, the Condomínio Espiritual Ubirapuru (CEU), in Fortaleza, Brazil, a small town where several religious families, ecclesial movements and social associations are gathered. Cf. Casa do Menor Italia ONLUS. Who we are. <http://www.milongaproject.org/ong/ceu-condominio-espiritual-uirapuru-fortaleza-brasile/>. (accessed on 10 September 2022).
- 19 In 1967, Chiara met in Istanbul with Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I. Lubich made no fewer than nine trips to Istanbul to meet with the Patriarch.
- 20 This is in accordance with the Second Vatican Council, which emphasizes, “Let all the faithful remember, that the better they will promote, indeed live in practice the union of Christians, the more they will strive to lead a life more in conformity with the Gospel” (Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican 1964, 7c. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_it.html). (accessed on 10 September 2022).
- 21 This is consistent with the Council teaching expressed in the Declaration of Nostra Aetate, 3.
- 22 In 1979, Lubich met Nikkyo Niwano, founder of the lay Buddhist renewal movement, Rissho Kosei-kai and co-founder of the World Conference on Religions for Peace. In 1981—at his invitation, Lubich spoke about her Christian experience to ten thousand animators of that Movement, gathered at a Buddhist temple in Tokyo. In 1997—at the request of the Grand Master Ajahn Thong, Lubich spoke about interreligious dialogue and her spiritual experience to their more than 800 students (lay people, monks and nuns) gathered at the Buddhist Mahachulalongkorn University in Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- 23 In 1997, Lubich received an honorary doctorate in the Humanities from Sacred Heart University Fairfield in Connecticut, USA, for “merits in the field of Christian-Jewish dialogue”. Rabbi Jack Bemporad—then president of the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of the Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut, USA, who was the speaker for this Doctorate, in motivating the decision to award it, said at the time, “The work of the Focolare, and the endeavors of Chiara Lubich is a work that will continue further because it is founded on two fundamental ideas: first the ideal of love, and then the ideal of unity”.
- 24 In 1997, at the Malcolm Shabazz Mosque in New York City (Harlem), Lubich spoke to three thousand Muslims.
- 25 In her relationship with the Hindus, because of their openness and depth, Lubich conveyed her sapiential and mystical experience of “Paradise’49”.
- 26 Among other things, Lubich promoted symposiums of dialogue: The Hindu-Christian gatherings in 2002, 2003 and 2004; the Buddhist-Christian gathering in 2004 in Rome, and 2006 in Osaka-Japan; the Jewish-Christians and between Muslims and Christians in 2005 and 2007 in Castel Gandolfo. The Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, as well as Rabbis and Jewish scholars, attended audiences with Popes-John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and continue to do so with Pope Francis.
- 27 A phrase borrowed from St. John Chrysostom: In Joannem homilia 51: PG 59, 284.
- 28 “Συννοράω” from Plato and Aristotle expressed as “συννορανεις εν ειδος”, which literally means “seeing and getting to know together”. (See: Elisabetta Poddighe 2020. *Aristotele e il synoran. La visione globale tra politica e storia, tra retorica e diritto*. Milano: Franco Angeli.)
- 29 In African culture, the person is given prominence, hence Anthropology.
- 30 In Latin American culture, the social life of the people is particularly emphasized, thus, Sociology.
- 31 The origin of the world-man idea goes back to a moment in 1972 when Lubich experiences the impossibility of communicating with one of her nieces. She realizes that she must “lose,” in a sense, her cultural categories and even God, in order to enter into the reality of this young woman and her contemporaries. (Lubich 1997, pp. 28–29).
- 32 Such an approach represents the initiative of Pope Paul VI, who in 1968 established January the 1st as the Day for Peace, stressing that “The world must be educated to love Peace, to build it up and defend it,” and already at that time he believed that “a new training must educate the new generations to reciprocal respect between nations, to brotherhood between peoples, to collaboration between races, with a view also to their progress and development”. (Paul VI 1967).
- 33 This can be found in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Socrates and Seneca.

- ³⁴ It was not long after Jesus Christ that the golden rule in a positive format was presented by Seneca. In his moral Letters to Lucilius, he wrote, “Treat your inferiors as you would be treated by your betters”. (Seneca 2013).
- ³⁵ Lubich observes that a similar phenomenon has been noted by A. H. Maslow, who notices a certain silence and, therefore, too little interest in love toward the other (Lubich 2005, p. 23). According to him, this kind of silence probably means “a certain academic hypocrisy, which consists in putting the easier before the necessary”. Moreover, for him, exploring the topic of love is an extremely complex task in any culture, and even more so at the scientific level, but: “love must be learned, created, spoken, otherwise the world will be doomed to hostility and uncertainty”. (Maslow 1973, p. 293).
- ³⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24.

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