

*Beyond Contemporary Civilizational Crisis
of the Human Being and the Humanities.
A Chiara Lubich's Perspective*

ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss the nature, causes and effects of the crisis of civilization which we can observe for over forty years. This crisis affects social order, with its economic, institutional and demographic dimensions, as well as the culture and the social structure. Here, I am particularly dealing with the question of human person and their relations with others, as well as the humanities. I show globalization, the growth of cancerous mass culture and secularization as a background of the crisis of civilization. In this context, I try to show the importance of Chiara Lubich and her work.

KEYWORDS: Chiara Lubich, civilization, civilizational crisis, social order, crisis of human person

I would like to dedicate this article to the great figure of our time, Chiara Lubich. Her charisma and teaching, in my conviction, can be a very important signpost on the more and more difficult path through the current postindustrial civilizational crisis. I will begin with characterizing this crisis. Then, I will try to present some of its effects in the basic spheres of contemporary human being's life. Then, I would like to consider the crisis of modern

* Correspondence regarding the paper should be sent to: Krzysztof Wielecki, University of Warsaw, e-mail: k.wielecki@uw.edu.pl

human person and the humanities, which are, I think, one of the effects of the civilizational crisis. As a result, the humanities are a poor backrest for the today's "night of culture's" human being, as sometimes Chiara Lubich would say. Finally, I'm going to show Chiara Lubich's selected thoughts, which – I believe – could be a real help for lost people and the stray humanities of the third millennium's first half, who are, I suppose, both strayed and disoriented in their own fasting carnival's parades.

To my mind, the eponymous crisis is above all a turning point connected with a great civilizational change, together with its side effects which affect almost all spheres of the life of society, including culture and the human psyche. In the said civilizational change, a series of historical processes coincided within the same time and space; first and foremost – secularization, the development of capitalist economic instruments and the scientific and technical revolution which brought about a technological breakthrough. In the nineteenth century the processes converge, thus creating the capitalist industrial society. By the middle of the twentieth century, due to the new developments in technology and science, the crisis of industrialism begins to show more and more distinctly, to become fully apparent in the seventies, and the talk is rather of post-industrialism. Then, the modernity comes in for harsh and scalding criticism, which allows us to talk about post-modernity¹.

CIVILIZATION, SOCIAL ORDER AND THEIR CRISIS

It is sometimes thought that first industrialism and then post-industrialism became the reasons for the current crisis. The reasoning is the following: new inventions are followed by new

¹ I deal with this topic in more detail in: K.Wielecki, *Podmiotowość w dobie kryzysu postindustrialnego. Między indywidualizmem a kolektywizmem*, Warszawa 2003

technologies, and these bring about changes in all aspects of human existence, including ideologies, scientific trends and culture. More Marxist-oriented theoreticians think that technological changes result in changes in the mode of production, and these lead directly to a cascade of all-encompassing revolutions, up to, and including, a political revolution. Therefore they, i.e. theoreticians like Negri and Hardt, expect the socio-political system to change. The change in the mode of production is already there (Hardt, Negri 2001).

Other thinkers, though, focus on the changeable wafts of zephyrs, the tsunamis of intellectual trends and on the resulting discussions within the world of science. They do not dissociate themselves from diagnosing the current crisis, but, while the followers of the former orientation would rather talk of post-industrialism, these here would prefer to deal with postmodernism. Postmodernism has nothing to do with factories – it is a trend in thinking that has no name of its own for a reason but seems to be a variety of modernity of some sort, although its program is somewhat in the way of carnival.

I do not feel like coming back to the long-outdated issue of primacy between the base and the superstructure. I think no one is able to distinguish clearly between the operation of technological and manufacturing factors in the sphere of culture and society and the self-inspired intellectual, moral, and generally, spiritual, invention. There is no other way, then, we need to analyze the present time considering multiple threads, being aware of what the followers of the binary logic dislike so much, i.e. a great many correlations, or, rather, whole chains of causation within which the relations are changeable and reciprocal.

When negating both materialist and transcendent inspirations, intellectual trends need to resort to self-fertilization. What regards the retreat from the transcendent, one might ironically observe that it was the Enlightenment that started the great secularization. Later on, many announced God's death and hastened to per-

form secular *aspersion* over the grave of all metaphysics. However, while Enlightenment-initiated modernity bestowed a promise upon us to found the world on the human reason, which, admittedly, has never been kept, the post-modernity denies us even that illusory solace.

The hypothesis is, therefore, the following: two processes, distant from each other in time, i.e. enlightenment and secularization on the one hand and capitalist-based industrialization on the other, converged in the nineteenth century to form a synergic union that transformed the world, bringing it to an industrial crisis, or the crisis of modernity, or, rather, – and this is one of the major conclusions of this paper – to both of them at the same time.

Capitalism is the organizing principle of manufacturing and trade coupled with the associated economic thought which dates back to the time of the great geographical discoveries and the then revival of trade. What became the turning point for capitalism, was, however, the meeting with the other process that started around the eighteenth century and the unusual animation of scientific and technical thought, the so called scientific and industrial revolution, followed by the development of manufactories and, finally, of industry. When conditions are favorable for capital to get amassed on a large scale and to enter the social space, capitalism creates a new legal and political order. Thus, when capitalism and industrialism meet, they become a great force, disturbing the foundations of civilization. They create a new social order, shaking the traditional social structure, the institutional order and – which is of special importance to us here – culture. These processes result in deep and sweeping changes in the systems of norms, thinking trends, artistic movements, mores, types of interpersonal relationships, conceptions and collective rationalizations.

The sheer scope of these changes alone should be enough for them to be considered the greatest crisis in human history, irrespective of evaluation of their effects. And yet, the crisis has been made more far-reaching and more dramatic by the process

of secularization, which resulted in religiousness starting to die out. Secularization, whose first manifestations date back to the Renaissance, gets a significant impulse for development from the thought of the Enlightenment, which founds the world on the human reason and promises that it is with the power of reason that the world can be understood, and initiated on the path to progress.

God is no longer necessary, and with time he will become superfluous or even harmful since the idea of God hinders progress of human's world. The promise of the good services that could be rendered by the mind in this respect has never been kept, while people had been deprived of the spiritual and moral foundations amid a tumultuous crisis, which made the crisis even graver.

Referring to social order, we mean a constantly created, recreated and transformed result of a changeable, internally heterogeneous, complex and dynamic process of structuration. This is a process which constitutes the relatively continuous and unbroken basis for the organization of the social practice of life, in other words it crystallizes, reproduces, disintegrates and transforms the relatively steady fundamentals of a relatively defined large community. The social order understood in this way determines a more or less durable framework for the common practice of life.

Within the social order, we can distinguish five dimensions: the social structure (groups, strata and classes, as well as the system of relations between them), culture, the institutional order, the economic order, and the demographic order. These five dimensions are all interrelated: a major occurrence in one of them produces effects in all the remaining ones. Great civilizational changes disturb the foundations of the social order. Today's reality is characterized by the break-up of industrialism, brought about by scientific and technical achievements of the post-World War II period, which have been causing important technological changes in the most advanced societies since the 1970s. These, in turn, have resulted in profound civilizational, demographic, cultural

and social changes, which also happen to be fast-paced. Furthermore, this is the time of transition between two civilizational formations and, as a result, between two types of social orders in all of their possible dimensions. Changes in culture give rise to a crisis of the way in which people understand the world, the aim and sense of living, the morality, obligations and solidarity. Thus, ours is also the time of a mental crisis, a crisis of traditional horizons of reference and frameworks of action and also a very severe crisis of fundamental institutions, as well as – in the case of many people – a crisis of personal identity (Wielecki, 2003).

THE CRISIS OF HUMAN PERSON

For me, a central concept to the understanding of the situation of the human being in today's civilizational crisis are the 'horizons of reference'. This is the fundamental category describing the person's reflexive relation with the world. Nonetheless, for further reasoning to be clear, I claim that in order to exist, a person must have a basic conviction that they understand the world they lives in. This is the condition *sine qua non* for a sense of meaning, without which, over the long term, one cannot preserve their mental health, not to mention the so-called ontic safety. This is the basis of shaping the identity and human subjectivity. Therefore, the person undertakes actions oriented at getting to know the world by employing various practices of understanding and interpretation. Science, including the humanities, is one of the forms of fulfilling this function.

The imaginations that we create about the order of the world, its representation (I am not deciding whether it is true or not), comprise the intellectual sphere to which we refer, which orientates our life. This sphere is defined by the basic convictions concerning the meaning of the world and its nature. I call them horizons of reference. Within a horizon of reference, we can ana-

lytically identify an ontological, axiological and epistemological horizon. Collective horizons of reference are constructed in the processes of communication. They are culturally variable, but they convey universal values and determine what is considered to be rational or meaningful in a given civilizational formation. The representation that we create is like a horizon. A horizon is a fiction, an imaginary line that enables us to accurately define the individual and collective position.

Similarly, horizons of reference enable us to define our social position, our relations with the world, with its different points – which thus appear as close or distant – our relations with other people, communities and cultures – and finally with ourselves (thus, being the basis of our identity). This line does not exist in reality, but it allows us to effectively navigate in the world of society and culture (Wielecki, 2003, p. 277). Nonetheless, horizons of reference are not completely fictitious, because they show (of course subjectively, and only to a certain degree faithfully), an absolutely “real reality”, a subjectively understood ontic world.

I must once again return to the thesis about the crisis. I believe that the deep changes occurring in the contemporary world constitute a crisis of all the dimensions of today’s collective and individual life. With reference to M. S. Archer’s work, due to these civilizational processes we must not focus on dealing with strict determinism in culture, in all the dimensions of the social order and in the subjectivity of human subjects. In the light of the British scholar’s work, and especially her concepts of morphogenesis and morphostasis, a simple cause and effect correlation does not exist between these civilizational, cultural, social processes and the condition of a sociological theory. However, I do believe that all these changes cause problems – a system of challenges – to which the subjective, relatively autonomous, free and agential individual, social structures, and culture, have to respond. The fact of the matter is that today this is especially difficult. This is also a crisis of the horizons of reference, in all three dimensions,

a crisis of life orientations, and a crisis of the meaning of the world and of the significance of one's own life. Perhaps these are some of the most important concerns (using Margaret Archer's term) of the contemporary person (Archer, Collier, Porpora. 2004) (Archer. 2006). This is a crisis of the essence of Humanity and the way we understand ourselves and the world.

One of the features of the contemporary culture which – with its shattered horizons of reference, both individual and collective ones – is becoming more global and narcissistic, is egocentric individualism. The evil is located not within the individualistic, but within the egocentric. On the other pole of ideological attitudes related to the individualistic egocentrism, there is collectivism. Especially its extreme form, as racism, chauvinism, communism. All these ideologies invalidate and devalue the individual, consider its good absolutely secondary in respect to some social collective: a nation, a social class or a race. And yet, a human being cannot exist outside society and outside culture. So as society and culture cannot exist without individuals. The subjectivity of human being and human collectives is therefore a relational category, reflecting the relational nature of human and of society.

Contemporary civilizational changes, including the contemporary egocentric individualism, which is strongly attached to it, cause, to great extent, a crystallization of the narcissistic culture, a massive spread and advancing of the individual and collective narcissism. Thus, they become a significant cause of the crisis of contemporary democracy. The collective narcissism manifests itself, among others, on the level of systems of values, which in a society with narcissistic features are treated in a superficial and selective manner. Social poses and gestures are appreciated more for their forms than for their meaning, with domination of the cult of success, over-exposure of one's virtues both in public and in informal relationships, and martyrdom. Other persons, and also other nations, cultures and races, as well as more real values are diminished. Relationships with others are marked with more or

less publicly expressed sense of grievance and all kinds of claims, together with a demonstrated sense of superiority, covering a disbelief in oneself, and a deeply hidden inferiority complex. In such a society, a lack of social sensitivity, and of systematic, quiet work for others' sake is spreading. Deep bonds fade and decline, while loose, although numerous superficial relationships grow. The narcissistic culture is manifesting itself also in the domination of entertainment over other forms of transmission, in retreat of real cultural content from private and local relationships, with mass communication in its place. The media impose the most important values, goals, lifestyles. In such culture, idols and celebrities, whose actual merits are rather questionable, become of greatest importance. The narcissistic culture is distinguished by medialisation of life, up to invalidation of everything which remains outside the media spectacle.

Narcissism is mostly a representation of what de Tocqueville used to call egoism. "Egoism is a passionate and exaggerated love of self which leads a man to think of all things in terms of himself and to prefer himself to all." (506). But also, as it seems, it is a result of individualism, especially in its egocentric form. "Individualism", continues de Tocqueville, "is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself." (506). "Egoism sterilizes the seeds of every virtue." (507).

A side effect of the civilizational crisis described here is nowadays, as I mentioned, the crisis of human. Upon our own wish, sometimes in high spirits of an illusory sense of freedom and power, we end up alone. We fall into egocentric individualism, which separates us from other people, including family, but also from God and from church, which renders the process of reintegrating the horizons of reference more difficult. Yet maybe it is, above all, a mental crisis of human and their culture at the turn

of epochs. One of the aspects of the cosmic loneliness of a narcissistically hurt individual is the crisis of mental health. We cannot psychically stand it. The great civilizational change ploughs the whole world before our own eyes – it seems we are unable to design our identity, a sense of the world making sense, importance of our own existence on the quicksand of the turn of civilizations.

THE CRISIS OF HUMANITIES

This article concerns the crisis of all spheres of human life, but especially the crisis of human person and the humanities. For me, especially important is the connection between the mass culture as a product of the civilizational crisis in the world undergoing globalization, above mentioned crisis of human being and today's intellectual trends, which have a dramatic impact on the present-day humanities.

In the second half of the seventies, the humanities fell into such a severe crisis, that they are not only unable to help in these troubled times, but themselves are going through probably the most dangerous collapse in their history. Today, they are in a state of a serious paradigmatic disintegration. I'm trying to explain that the fasting carnival of the crisis of post-modernity is a non-coincidental affliction of culture at a time of a civilizational turning point. The phrase 'fasting carnival' of course refers to Michał Bakhtin's concept (Bakhtin, 1975). Bakhtin wrote about a useful discourse of the times of loftiness and tomfoolery. A serious thought, when the power of its freshness runs out, is met with mockery, irony and scorn. In carnival time, people take out the stiffness of the previous epoch. The dialectics of loftiness and tomfoolery gives a much needed impulse for development. Let me perhaps add here that tomfoolery, too, can sometimes become routinized and stiff, though.

In our age, boundaries are getting blurred, identities are vanishing, dialectics does not work. This is the time of eclecticism, when loftiness and tomfoolery co-occur, merging and incapacitating one another. Ours is not the time of seriousness or tomfoolery, but one of a fasting carnival.

The post-industrial civilization provides probably more opportunities for celebrating the carnival than ever before. Globalization, with the famous shrinking of time and space, makes us live in a great array of nationalities, religions, cultures and values. To the contemporary human, the world appears as a kaleidoscope of flickering colors, pictures and impressions. In the globalized ether, vibrates a plethora of different kinds of cultural confetti; in comparison, the striking power of Andersen's *Snow Queen* can only be called touching. The most profitable and best portending for the future are becoming those investments in the Net which provide subscribers with experiences affecting the senses and organizing their free time.

This function is served by the Internet through which we can be in touch with the whole world: we can share the joys with the newlyweds who are total strangers to us and who announce their happiness to us; we can join the bloggers in their dilemmas of self-mystification, sympathize with the victims of any of the publicized tragedies, become friends with a discussion group or fall in love incognito with an anonymous individual of unstated gender and age (Wielecki, 2005).

Since there is no space here for discussing subjectivity, I have to refer those interested to other readings (Wielecki, 2003). However, if we single out the pre-subjective state, and then the state of narcissistic subjectivity, and then, finally – if need be – the altruistic one with its transcendence phase, then anyway, the latter and the highest in the possible development of the human person is a result of a dramatic effort to cross the boundary of freedom understood as the freedom to be oneself tending towards the freedom to be somebody more, somebody oriented towards

values and transcendence. This is more often than not accompanied by pain and tension than ease and well-being. I am not being nostalgic about a mythical past, nor even is the inevitable disgust getting the better of me. A civilizational change has to be difficult and also one cannot rule out that the future will be better than the past. The point is, however, that we need to understand that the freedom gained by the contemporary human is the result of a double crisis which comes against broken horizons of reference which will not get united in the secularized world of the postindustrial and postmodern crisis.

There we are, a carnival of the present time with a fasting depression of the lonely, the neurotic, the lost and sometimes the suicidal, drug addicts and those suffering from other effects of the present crisis. I want to show that post-modernism is not the solution to the crisis, but one of its manifestations. There is no shortage in it of the fasting tomfoolery that the present paper is about. Humor, play, irony are all good and fine, but the time is not always suitable. Those frolics by humanists are taking place – as I have suggested before – in a world affected by all kinds of serious, I dare say, dramatic crisis – spiritual, moral, mental, cultural, political and economic. Therefore, those intellectual games are like a carnival party on the Titanic.

When one juxtaposes two types of scholars with each other, as did Leszek Kołakowski, i.e. *philosophers-priests* (after the Nietzschean *priest-ascetic*) and *philosophers-jesters* (Kołakowski, 1989), then, I assume, it is about the kind of dispute between carnival vs. lent and not, as post-modernists seem to think, buffoonery instead of dispute. When Leszek Kołakowski, explaining what the *philosophy of a jester* is and what its duties are, says that they are *a constant effort of reflecting upon the possible arguments in support of opposing ideas ...* (Kołakowski, 1989, p. 178), then we are talking about the necessary criticism of a scholar who could be his or her own jester. There could also be a talk about criticism as a regular part of science. However, when the author explains

later on that it *simply is the overcoming of what is, just because it is there, yet it is governed not by the desire to oppose, but by a lack of trust towards all things established* (Kořakowski, 1989), then we are dealing with some kind of axiology, though, or maybe theology of contrariness. We also find out that buffoonery is not always about a sense of humor and spontaneous expression, but also distrust. This is a very important observation. For trust is the main cement of societies and identities; whereas carnival and suffering is one of the main threads of this text.

The fasting carnival of today's world and today's discourse is becoming a framework of a public pseudo-debate. One of the characteristics is the fact that the disputes of today seem to be taking place in a Quasiland. The war over religiousness can be an example. The dispute with God, the Church and the believers is taking place in some virtual world. By juxtaposing the Inquisition, the crusades, political movements with fascist tendencies and other attributes of the black image of Catholicism, a fiction is created, based on elements picked at will from the 2000-year old tradition in order to build a possibly most off-putting image. However, it is forgotten that the Church of today is the Church after the Second Vatican Council, after the encyclical *Deus caritas est* by the present Pope. Its daily life now is the ecumenical, open charismas like Chiara Lubich's and her *Focolari*, the Church of God who speaks with a *subtler voice* – as Charles Taylor puts it – and often covers up the ways and only leaves a Lévinasian track, the Church of God who loves us all until His death on the cross, where He died also for non-believers, and who wants, first of all, our love. Also, when constructing the image of an atheist who desires to murder unborn children and live in promiscuity, one is telling a fabricated truth. This is mutual tomfoolery, a carnival party with participants wearing papier-mâché masks of monsters which they keep pinning on each other. But this is often the only voice that can be heard in public. This is how resistance and buf-

foonery for their own sake, and not for the sake of discourse, are manifested.

In the sphere of cultural discourse (including academic discourse), we are therefore not faced with participants engaging in discourse with each other first with loftiness, then with tomfoolery, then again with loftiness and so on and so forth, but with both things at the same time, and most often with some eclecticism, some parodied loftiness and pompous tomfoolery, which Bachtin did not envisage. This has already become a negation of a negation of a negation.

Besides the carnival of intellectuals and ideologists, there is the reality. In it, too, fasting and carnival get mixed, creating an atmosphere of a fasting carnival. Besides the post-modernist ban on grand narrations, the world is being shaken by the tectonic movements of globalization. Besides the ban on passing judgments in the sphere of culture, lording is the mass culture: omnipotent, depriving people of humanity and pushing them out of ties and bonds and morality, disintegrating communities and – contrary to its manifests – deeply undemocratic. Despite the promises having been made of achieving happiness through freedom, there is neither freedom nor happiness; there is loneliness, neurotism, narcissism, depression and non-sexual necrophilia, unparalleled suffering which is noticed even by postmodernists themselves, and there are tons of psychological literature, pardon me, popular psychological literature offering salvation for the market price of a given publication – unfortunately without any guarantee.

For me – as I said – especially important is the connection between the mass culture as a product of the civilizational crisis in the world undergoing globalization and today's intellectual trends, which have a dramatic impact on the present-day humanities, including the orientations and paradigms of sociology. I am making an attempt – a sketchy one out of necessity – at defining the civilizational crisis of our times, at characterizing its "fluid" culture, at understanding the effects on people's identities and

mental health today and at showing the civilizational and cultural context of discourse in the humanities. An extraordinary revival of thought is often the result of a civilizational crisis where the straitjacket of traditional paradigmatic principles seems too tight, and usually rightly so. A plethora of concepts, theories, proposals arise then, including paradigmatic ones. Many feel the need of radical changes and breaking all ties, many take an orthodox stance and there is also no shortage of all kinds of experimentalists, or else, ideologists of the impossibility of science. All of these attitudes seem rational in a way and useful in general. They add tension to the intellectual discourse and create a relatively broad cognitive perspective for research.

AN ATTEMPT OF A RELATIONAL INSIGHT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHIARA LUBICH'S MESSAGE.

Let us try to understand the core of the drama of the contemporary human. As we know, they remain in relations with *others*, driven by needs and desires. *The other*, with which we enter into relationship, is not a mere part of our environment. They are not only a source of satisfying our needs. The relation with them is always subjective. Emmanuel Lévinas referred to it by saying the other “throws us into ethicality”, they are a summon to us. He saw the *fulcrum* for human and their world in the Old Testament God and in His great promise. Yet an encounter with God is always an encounter with the human person, anyone *who misses the human person, loses paradise and God*. Beyond other human's face, we experience the *non-face* of God. Thus, the thing that throws us into ethicality and summons us, is the face of *The Other*. An encounter is necessary in the first place, but it is only possible under the condition of loneliness, which is a torment and suffering. This, in turn, can help us discover the closeness of human and open oneself to the encounter (Levinas 1998, p. 32 et seq.).

The experience of *The Face* is the key here. It is a kind of a moral challenge which awakens our freedom. But this challenge is also a *limit*, a ban, an other's request. Not only of a specific other, but also of the one, whose Face and promise the other reminds us of. It is here that feeling ashamed and entering into ethics begins, which always means self-limiting. Because *morality begins*, says Lévinas, *where freedom, instead of justifying itself, feels lawlessness and violence* (Levinas, 1998, p. 175).

A catholic philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, explains the existence of human as a co-existence, a being, which is always an encounter, possible, when *he* becomes *thou*, when *he* ceases to be an object to us and begins to be a subject. Yet the core of the subject is in being as a relation, which is a participation with God (Marcel 1965, 1984). When *He* becomes *Thou* to me, a communion of *We* happens. The communion is possible also as an encounter with another human. An impulse to this subjective relation to God or to other humans is a summon of God. As Józef Tischner explains, *There is a summon coming from God present in every human. The human, together with everything what is inside them, is a somewhat mumbling response to that summon*. While a Judaic philosopher Martin Buber, at the same time and completely independently, claimed the essence of human's life is an encounter. All real life is but an encounter, he said. Human expresses and shapes themselves in the encounter. Relationships of the individual with the world can be monologic: *I – it* or dialogic: of type *I – thou*. In the latter, human speaks with their whole being, therefore it is of a subjective character.

This is the context which lets us refer to the question of the crisis of the contemporary world, of human and of the humanities from the perspective of Chiara Lubich's teaching. She was not looking for answers to those dramatic questions in books. As she put it in her speech during awarding her a honorary doctorate at the Catholic University of Lublin, 19th June 1996: "50 years ago, I ceased to occupy myself with studies, literally taking my

books out to the attic. It was not only for lack of time (as this was the time when the Focolari movement was born), but chiefly because I couldn't satisfy my hunger for the truth better and fuller than in the one, who refers to himself: <<I am (...) the truth>> (J 14,6)". This is the perspective from which Chiara Lubich looked at the drama of our times and of the contemporary human. The perspective of getting beyond human egoism, weakness, being lost, which are most probably the perennial human diseases, but – as I tried to prove – in contemporary times, as a result of the civilizational crisis, have dramatically increased. Chiara Lubich sought for support in transcendence, towards the truth in Jesus. Not because she wanted to turn away from human problems or invalidate them. On the contrary: to find a perspective for understanding, and maybe even solving them.

Chiara Lubich's comment to the problems of the human person and of the humanities mentioned before was the diagnose that "in designing a society, which wanted to be considered progressive, the decisive place was taken by hatred". When Chiara was starting her journey with a group of girls, the Second World War was still on. Hatred showed its most nasty face at that time. And at the very same time, those young Italian girls discovered the power of love. Chiara wrote: Although the Gospel delighted us, we were especially moved by some words of Jesus, emphasizing love: to love God, to love the neighbor, to love one another, to open oneself to the spiritual presence of Christ among us, which He Himself has promised to us, where two or three gather in His name (por. Mt 18,20)". This thought has become the most important charism. In the above described world of civilizational crisis at the turn of millennium, does it not seem extremely up to date? This "charism of unity" gives a new meaning to the philosophy of dialogue, to relational and interactionist social theories, enables us to understand the core of the economical crisis, of the crisis of family, marriage, politics etc. It also seems to tidy up and synthesize the ground for a social theory which makes it pos-

sible to get out of the vicious circle of the *fasting carnival* and to diagnose the deep causes of the crisis of the modern world and of the contemporary humanities by proposing mutual love with Jesus in our midst as a solution. "In His name (conf. Mt 18,20), it means, explains Chiara Lubich, in His love; to follow the Love most perfectly expressed: Jesus crucified; to build unity resulting from mutual love not only with those who lead the Church but with everyone ("so that all one" [J 17, 21]), to build this unity as, being Christians, we have all been called to live unity in the image of the Holy Trinity".

Many forms of contemporary evil result, I suppose, from having got lost in the civilizational crisis of our world and from suffering which human cannot handle and which – as many contemporary people tend to think – has no importance, in the world that make no sense. The pain of existence is most probably also a result of the egocentric individualism of a human thrown into a narcissistic mass culture and into the egoism of economy and of politics. Increasing suicide indexes show how much we cannot handle ourselves and how little we care for those who we leave. We suffer in loneliness, with our dramatic *ultimate concerns* – as Margaret S. Archer puts it.

Our pain cannot be lesser than the one of Chiara and of her young companions, then, at the end of the Second World War in Italy. As Chiara wrote: "we learned that Jesus suffered most, when he experienced the abandonment of His Father on the cross: *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me*" (Mt 27,46). We were deeply moved – Chiara recalled – with this fact. [...] From that moment on, we were discovering his face everywhere: in suffering of soul, which we tried to love, as they are an expression of Him, and in suffering of our neighbors, especially those severely suffering". Thus, in the times of egocentric individualism, it is us to have abandoned *the Father*, we do not want to see the *Face* of the *Other* and after a short while we don't want do *discover His face* anywhere. As a result, we cease to notice any other *faces* at

all, of those being just like us, in the narcissistic pain of loneliness. In the light of Chiara Lubich's message, I understand it as a challenge also for the humanities: to seek for this kind of perspective to defeat the crisis of human and of the humanities.

I could say, after prof. Adam Biela, who delivered the laudation during the ceremony of awarding Chiara Lubich with the honorary doctorate at the Catholic University of Lublin on 19th June 1996: "what could my words mean compared to the new phenomenon of building a new quality in the real world...". Or I could even ask: what could social sciences and the humanities mean? Yet Chiara, although she *took her beloved books to the attic*, still loved them and had been raised on them. The Focolare Movement (Movimento dei Focolari) she created, also called *The Work of Mary* do their best to bring to life the charism they were given in all dimensions of life. Chiara understood very well the importance and the aim of the humanities. The *Sophia* University is the best example for it, and many prominent scholars connected to the *Movement* develop modern humanities on the highest level. In my opinion, the charisms of Chiara could give direction to the scientific thought so that it could reach beyond the present-day crisis of human, society, culture, and the humanities themselves. And, thanks to that, it could serve for understanding and solving the most dramatic problems of contemporary times. The aim of this article was to show how much the message of Chiara Lubich is embedded in the humanities, yet at the same time it is a very attractive and important indication – a signpost. It helps us understand the world of the beginning of the third millennium and seek for solutions to its most significant problems.

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