

whoever drinks the water

thinks of the source

In Trent in the footsteps of Chiara Lubich



Cover photo by G. Zotta: June 2001.
Chiara Lubich at the door of No 2, Piazza Cappuccini, Trent.
*Here she went to live with some of her very first companions in the autumn of 1944.
This group became the first focolare.*

*The history of Trent has made it on various occasions
a city of dialogue:
ecumenical and civil dialogue.*

*Here in Trent Chiara Lubich's ideal of unity
was born and for the last 60 years this ideal
has encouraged millions of people
in all continents of the world to put unity
in the first place.*

*Each person is called to construct
pockets of fraternity wherever they are,
be it in the religious field, political, economic, artistic, juridical,
sporting, communications, wherever.*

*Because of this many people visit Trent:
people from all over the world
who want to know about the places
where this gift from God took root.*

In fact there is a Chinese proverb which says:

**“ Whoever drinks the water
thinks of the source ”**





This is a true story which is told here and it is known in many parts of the world. At Trent there is the fascination of the concrete beginnings of this story and the facts that accompanied its birth. We will try and give a brief outline of these early days and the places where significant events took place, taking our cue from Chiara Lubich's talk in Trent on 10th June 2001.

- 1 The house where Chiara was born ■
- 2 The Church of Saint Mary Major ■
- 3 Via Gocciadoro ■
- 4 The Rosmini Teacher Training College ■
- 5 The Area of the White Madonna ■
- 6 At the Capuchin College ■
- 7 The Androne Quarter - The Laste - The Portela ■
- 8 San Vigilio Cathedral ■
- 9 The Gocciadoro Park ■
- 10 3rd November Street ■
- 11 Piazza Cappuccini, no 2 ■
- 12 The Church of Saint Clare ■
- 13 In the air raid shelters ■
- 14 In the cellar of Via Travai ■
- 15 Church of Saint Mark - Massaia Hall ■
- 16 The Archbishop's House - Piazza Fiera ■



The house where Chiara was born

This house is on Via Prepositura no. 41, 2nd floor. Chiara Lubich was born there on 22nd Jan. 1920. She was the second of four children. She described her childhood in this way: 'My father and my mother both worked in a printing business; in fact they got to know each other there. It was the printing works which produced a daily newspaper called The Popolo. This was a socialist newspaper. My mother used to go to Mass every day, she was intelligent, strong, and very sensitive. During the times when we had enough financially, we often heard her singing. She suffered when we had financial difficulties, above all because the children could not pursue their studies. My father was a socialist and he did not want to conform to the fascist regime. As a result he also suffered hunger and with him the rest of the family. After the First World War he had been a wine merchant but then there was the economic crisis and this activity ceased in 1930. He was out of work for many years. He loved me very much and he understood me!'

The Church of Saint Mary Major

This church has not changed much since 1920. It was the place where Chiara Lubich was baptised that year. There is a coincidence in the fact that she was baptised in the city which was the heart of the Counter-Reformation and in fact in the very church where several sessions of the Council of Trent were held (1545-1563).

The Baptist Pastor Edwin Robertson wrote in his biography that Chiara was to become the builder of bridges between Catholics and Lutherans. During a television interview in 1995, Chiara said 'Precisely in Trent, where the Council took place, where the divisions became fixed, there a hope of unity was born. In fact we are very engaged in ecumenism.'



VIA GOCCIADORO

'The first time when I felt the presence of a gift of God, of something new that was happening in me and that was not a fruit of my reasoning or of my intelligence, was when at the age of eighteen my heart was invaded by a very strong desire to know God. I was living with my family in Via Gocciadoro no. 1 (now no. 17).

(...) Who were the first people who gathered around our movement? The poor, the needy. I was still at home then in Via Gocciadoro. I don't remember exactly who encouraged me and my companions to go towards the poor people of our city. Perhaps it was Jesus' word: 'Whatever you have done to the least you have done to me' (Mt 25,40). I can't forget that the corridor in our house was full of everything that could be useful to the poor: boxes of jam, tins of powdered milk, bags of flour, clothes, medicines, wood.. all of which had come from who knows where! Without doubt from God's Providence!

I had finished my studies at the Teacher Training College and, wanting to go to University, I felt, perhaps, that in a catholic University I would have found people who would talk about God to me and would teach me who he was. Because my parents at that time were not well off economically, I applied and took an exam for a scholarship and I was not successful.

This seemed to be an adversity at the time and I remember clearly that I was very upset and my mother could not console me over this failure. But it was just in that moment that I noticed a certainty in my soul as if someone, to console me, was saying: 'I will be your teacher' and I immediately stopped feeling sad. I continued my life and I enrolled at a state University in Venice!

The Rosmini Teacher Training College





'It's 1943. While I am doing an act of love for my mother (I was going to buy milk in another part of the city in the place of my sisters who on a very cold day did not want to go), on the way it seemed to me as though the sky above me opened and somebody was inviting me to follow him with the words: 'Give yourself completely to me!'

The Area of the White Madonna

At the Capuchin College

7th December 1943

'I spoke immediately with my confessor about what had happened and he gave me permission to give myself to God for ever (this was 7th December 1943).

In this way the foundation stone of the Focolare Movement was laid, this spiritual building which had to arise.

I continued my friendship with my first companions, a friendship in God, and I told them of these first intuitions and inspirations!'





'I remember that in the mornings we would be working or studying but in the afternoons each one of us would go with two heavy suitcases full of goods to visit the three poorest quarters of the city known as: the Laste, the Portela, the Androne. It was often a question of climbing unsafe wooden stairs damaged by time or by rats. These stairs were old and dangerous, it was almost always dark and our young hearts were hurt by these desolating scenes. We would be there in a dark room where there was maybe a poor man or a poor woman in bed needing everything and it was Jesus. So we started to brush and clean the room, and we would console the people living there and we would promise that God would help them!'

'On one occasion Dori, one of our group who was cleaning everything, caught a serious infection on her face but she was happy with this. She had done everything for him for Jesus.'


The Androne Quarter The Laste - The Portela

'When a poor person came to our house we would put the best table cloth on and we would use the best cutlery and plates. Each one of us would keep a notebook and would make a note of where each poor person we met lived, so that we could continue to serve him or her.. Yes, because for us it wasn't a question of helping individual poor people, it was more that we wanted to help resolve the social problems of our city!'



San Vigilio Cathedral

'In the Cathedral every citizen of Trent had a personal place where they used to pray. I remember well where my place was. At the back of the Church there was a bench with a narrow window above it where I could receive enough light to study philosophy. Perhaps I studied there to be in contact with Jesus, with the Holy Spirit and to understand better my way in life. I remember there I had a type of conversion, one of the many I have had in life, when I realised that I was looking for truth in philosophy; and instead I realised that Jesus in the Eucharist was the Truth in person. So I left philosophy and I began to follow Jesus!'



Meanwhile the terrible second world war destroyed everything, so that many people had to leave the city and go as refugees into the mountains. On 13th May 1944, a bombing raid had made my house uninhabitable and I and my family had escaped to the Gocciadoro wood...

The Gocciadoro Park

I remember that night passed in the open lying with the others on the ground. All I remember of that night are two words: stars and tears. Stars, because, as the hours went by, I saw the stars pass above my head; tears, because I was crying having understood that I would not be able to leave Trent with my parents whom I loved very much. I already saw in my companions the movement that was being born and I couldn't abandon them. It seemed to me that the Holy Spirit to make me understand his will, suggested to me words which I had learnt at school, in Latin the phrase: *Omnia vincit amor*, love conquers everything. I asked myself therefore whether love for God would conquer this situation too. I had to let my parents leave on their own, I who was the only one at that time who had been sustaining them economically'.

'I did leave them, and my father was happy with this, and while they went off towards the mountains, I set off back towards the bombed city. At a certain point I remember, in a street called 3rd November, I met a desperate woman who took me by the shoulders and shouted: 'Four of my family are dead!'. I consoled her as much as I could and I understood, with an understanding that has never been cancelled, that from then on, to replace my suffering that I felt for having left my relatives, I would take into my heart the suffering of humanity. I looked for my companions in the street called San Martino, I searched in the streets and the houses that had all been bombed. All my companions were safe, thanks to God'.

3rd November Street



Piazza Cappuccini, no.2

'We were offered a small flat in Piazza Cappuccini.

Was this the first focolare?

We didn't know it at the time, but it really was.

With the war and its consequences those things and people which had been the ideal of us young people, disappeared. These ideals were... study.. a family...having

a nice house. ... The lesson that God was giving us was clear: everything passes, everything is vanity of vanities. At the same time the Holy Spirit was putting into my heart a question, a question that all of us were asking ourselves: is there an ideal which no bomb can destroy, an ideal that we can give ourselves completely to? Yes, the reply came, there is. It is God. God who there, in the midst of the war, the war which was a result of



hatred, appeared to us more than ever for that which he is: Love. God who is love. And we decided to make him the ideal of our life.

Every time the air raid siren went, we went to the shelter taking with us only a small book: the Gospel. The shelter was not far from the Church of the Capuchins. In the Gospel we were certain that we would have found the way for us too to be love. We opened it up and those words which we had heard many times seemed to be lighted up for us. This was the effect of the new charism, they inflamed our hearts and we felt pushed to put the words of the Gospel into practice. We read: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Mt 19,19). Our neighbour. Where was our neighbour? He was there, next to us, in all those people affected by the war, the wounded, those who had insufficient clothing, who had lost their house, the hungry, the thirsty. And immediately we dedicated ourselves to them'.



The Church of Saint Clare

'We read again in the gospel: 'Give and there will be gifts for you' (Lk 6,38). We gave, we gave and every time something came back to us. One day we had just one apple in the house. We gave it to a poor person who asked us for it and the following morning a dozen apples arrived. We gave them away too, and that evening a case full of apples arrived. Things always happened like this.

'Ask and you will receive' (Mt 21,22). We asked in prayer and we obtained. One day, and this is one of the episodes that often we talk about, a poor person asked me for a pair of shoes size 8. Knowing that Jesus was present in the poor, I prayed to the Lord, in the church of St. Clare which at that time was near a Hospital, I prayed in these words: 'Give me a pair of shoes size 8 for you in that poor person'.

Coming out of the church, a lady whom we knew, called Duccia Calderari, came up to us and gave me a packet. I opened it, and inside there was a pair of shoes size 8.

We had great joy in our hearts. Jesus had promised and we saw that he maintained his promises. So he is not someone from the past, he is present now and the gospel is true. Thoughts like this really set us on our way, on the new way we had undertaken. We communicated to others what was happening and these people we met, did not so much have the impression of meeting up with a group of girls, but rather meeting the living Jesus!

'The shelter where we used to go was not safe. Death was always near to us. I remember another question came to my mind: was there a word of the gospel which is particularly pleasing to God? If we were to die, we wanted to have lived that phrase of the gospel, at least in the last moments of our life. And the gospel in fact reveals this phrase: 'This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has a greater love than this: to give one's life for one's friends' (Jn 15,12-13).

We looked at each other and we declared to one another: 'I am ready to give my life for you', 'for you', 'for you'... Each one of us for each of the others. This was a solemn pact. Perhaps we are not asked immediately to die, but this pact means that we can share amongst us everything: our few material goods, whatever spiritual goods we have, sufferings, joys, trials'.

In the air raid shelters



In the cellar of Via Travai

'The war continued. One day we were sheltering from the bombs in a cellar, a dark cellar in Via Travai. We had a candle lit and we were reading the gospel. We read this phrase: 'Father ... may they all be one' (Jn 17,21); it was Jesus' prayer before he died. Because of that gift of the charism which I mentioned, we had the impression we understood what was under these difficult and strong words of the gospel and we were convinced that we were born to put that passage into practice, for unity, to contribute to the unity of humankind with God and for people among themselves. In that same prayer Jesus went on: 'May they be one in us, so that the world may believe' (Jn 17,21).



SALA
CARDINAL
MASSAIA

Church of Saint Mark/ Massaia Hall


'And this is what happened around us, so united through mutual love: who did not believe came to believe, who only had a small faith, believed more; people changed their life styles and they were converted to God; people found the strength to follow his call, a call they noticed in their hearts and they maintained their fidelity to the choices they had made.

After a few months in Trent, Povo, Martignano and the other villages nearby, about 500 people of all ages, men and women, of every vocation, of the most varied social backgrounds, shared our Ideal and there they formed, in the midst of the war, a community similar to that of the first christians'.

'One phrase from the gospel struck us in a particular way: 'Who listens to you (the apostles) listens to me' (Lk 10,16). We wanted to put this immediately into practice; we introduced ourselves to the Archbishop, mons. Carlo De Ferrari. He was a successor of the apostles. He listened to what we had to say, smiled and said: 'Here is the finger of God', and his approval and blessing was with us until he died. This first assent to what we were doing, on the part of the ecclesiastical authority, had a double effect on us: it assured us that the light that we were following was authentic, authentically Christian, and it also quickened our pace!'



The Archbishop's House Piazza Fiera



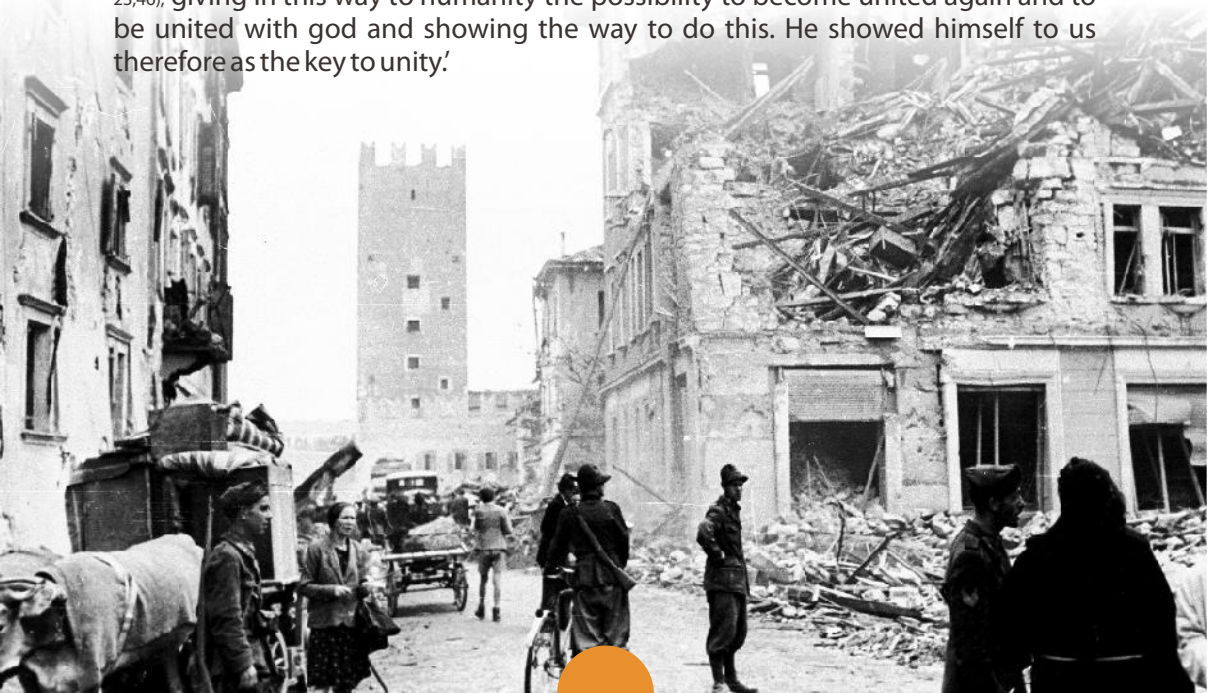
'Happiness, discoveries, graces, conquests. This is the gospel, certainly. But, right from the beginning we also understood that there is another side to things, that the tree has its roots... 'If the grain of wheat fallen into the ground does not die we read in John's gospel it remains alone; if it dies, on the other hand, it produces much fruit' (Jn 12,24)

The personification of this is Jesus crucified... In an incident in those first months of 1944, we had a new understanding of him. From a chance meeting we understood that the greatest suffering which Jesus had suffered, and therefore his greatest act of love, was when on the cross he experienced abandonment from the Father: ' My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt 27,46).

We were deeply touched by this. And with the enthusiasm of youth, but above all through a grace of God, we felt the urge to choose him in his abandonment, as a way of realising our ideal of love.'

And from that moment we seemed to discover his face everywhere. He who had experienced in himself the separation of human beings from God and among themselves, and had also felt the Father distant from himself, we now saw him not only in our personal sufferings, 'which were not lacking, and in the sufferings of our neighbours, who were often alone, abandoned, forgotten...', but we saw him

also in all the divisions, the trauma, the indifference that can be found in families, between generations, between poor and rich; in the church itself at times; and later we saw him in the separations of the various churches and later still in all the different religions and between who believes and who has other opinions... and he was the one who taught us how to confront these divisions, how to live them, how to contribute to overcoming them when, after his abandonment, he placed his spirit into the hands of the father: 'Father, into your hands i entrust my spirit' (Lk 23,46), giving in this way to humanity the possibility to become united again and to be united with god and showing the way to do this. He showed himself to us therefore as the key to unity.'





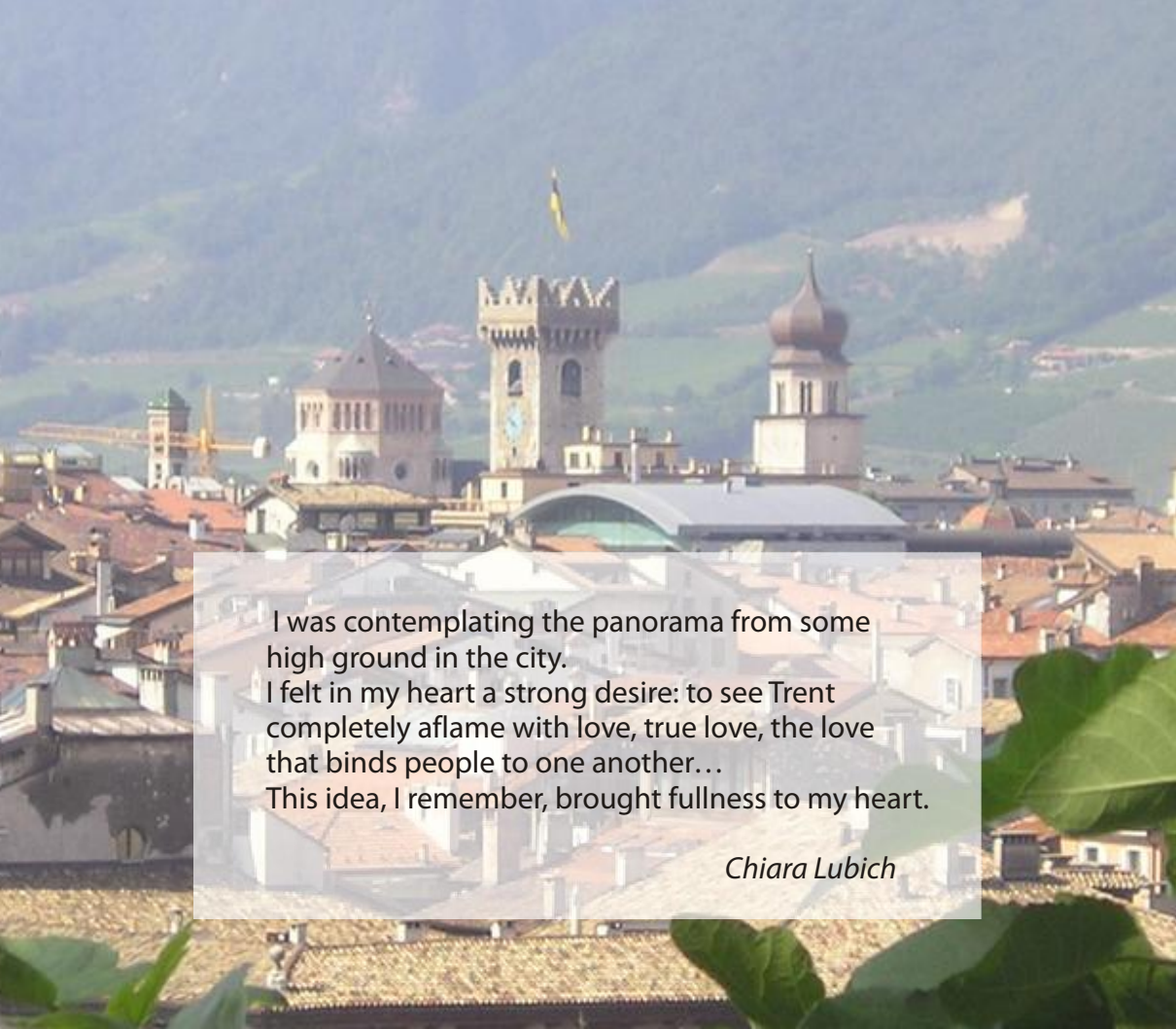
'This has been a brief summary of the early times of our movement, one of those charismatic realities in which John Paul II saw the flourishing of a new springtime in the Church. (...) We are always moved by the memory of his visit to Trent, on 30th April 1995, the city of the Council. On that occasion, in Piazza Fiera, he expressed this wish: that one day someone would write a treatise on the city of Trent. This would take as its starting point the Council of Trent, which sealed the division between the Churches, and would go on to describe the intervention of the charism of unity brought to the Church by the Focolare Movement, born in this same city!'





www.trentoardente.it
info@trentoardente.it

We would like to thank for the translation Malcolm Pyman of Liverpool



I was contemplating the panorama from some high ground in the city. I felt in my heart a strong desire: to see Trent completely aflame with love, true love, the love that binds people to one another... This idea, I remember, brought fullness to my heart.

Chiara Lubich