



Jesus  
Forsaken





**Chiara Lubich**

*Jesus  
Forsaken*

Edited by  
Hubertus Blaumeiser

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## Presentation of the book series\*

“To those who follow you, leave only the gospel.”

Chiara Lubich has articulated the gospel in many ways, which are outlined in twelve cornerstones: *God-love*, the *will of God*, the *Word of God*, *love of neighbor*, the *new commandment*, the *Eucharist*, the *gift of unity*, *Jesus crucified and forsaken*, *Mary*, the *Church-communion*, the *Holy Spirit*, *Jesus present among us*.

Since they emerged in the late 1940s, these points have been inscribed in the souls and in the lives of thousands of people from every corner of the earth. Nevertheless, since Chiara Lubich's death in 2008, what has been missing is a document that combined many texts, including those yet unpublished, that would illustrate them. This series of books seeks to deepen our understanding of these twelve cornerstones by presenting three sources from which they have emerged:

- the dimension of her personal testimony, especially as Chiara Lubich understood, deepened and lived these points;
- the theological dimension of reflecting on the mystery of God and of humankind;

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\* This volume contains Chiara Lubich's thought and experience on "Jesus Forsaken." While it is the eighth in this series of titles originally published in Italian by Città Nuova, it is the second to be translated in its complete form and published by New City Press. Other volumes in the series will be translated and published.

- the dimension of incarnating these points in human life via a communitarian experience, in line with Vatican II (see *Lumen Gentium* 9).

The series will include as many as twelve books, through which it is hoped that readers may discover:

- A great spiritual teacher who can accompany them in their spiritual life;
- A deeper appreciation of the communal aspect of Christian life, and the implications of a communitarian spirituality for the Church and humanity;
- A deeper and more personal understanding of Chiara Lubich's life and thought that they can apply in their everyday life.

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## Introduction

It is not a trivial matter that the earthly life of Jesus culminated, according to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, in a piercing cry: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In that question, one can find the questions, anxieties and dramas of all time. That cry opens a boundless space, and invites one to an encounter. It is far from the expression of a self-centered and overconfident person who muscles in and threatens to overwhelm the other. It is instead the cry of a God-Man who became radically poor to be within everyone’s reach, a brother to everyone, thus opening a dialogue that does not exclude anyone, starting from that which defines all human experience: suffering. In fact, we have a tremendous need for dialogue in this global world in which “a piecemeal third world war”<sup>\*</sup> may have already begun, and the “clash of civilizations”<sup>†</sup> is always on the horizon, while the challenges of justice and the environment are mostly ignored.

Jesus’ very profound question offers an opportunity for a universal encounter. It is an opportunity of encounter with the Father who answered by raising him and exalting him, introducing him

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\* Expression coined by Pope Francis.

† The first to speak first of a “clash of civilizations” was the American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in 1992. The term resurfaces and is deepened in an article published in 1993 in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*.

into heaven with his humanity that was battered physically, but permeated throughout with the Holy Spirit, by Love, space in which individuals and crucified peoples are welcomed and understood, and can hope for redemption.

That cry offers an opportunity for the encounter between peoples, cultures and religions in their diversity. It is no coincidence that Christianity was universal from the time of its birth at Pentecost and included a multiplicity of languages and social classes, revealing an impressive ability to assimilate into the most varied social contexts. This is because the Church has a vast openness and a limitless ability to unite, which ultimately springs out of that cry, that ultimate self-giving that breaks down all barriers and opens up infinite opportunities.

And yet it has been difficult for humanity to face that agonizing question, “Why?” It was difficult for the first Christians to proclaim the cross, because it was a clear sign of disgrace, of a curse. Augustine of Hippo affirmed that Jesus uttered that cry on our behalf, giving voice to our state of perdition. This was the prevalent thinking for nearly two millennia, with the exception of some mystics who, experiencing moments of the “dark night,” penetrated into that mystery. Among these, St. John of the Cross writes: “It is certain that, at the moment of his death, he was likewise annihilated in his soul, and was deprived of any relief and consolation, since his Father left him in the most intense aridity [...]. Wherefore he had perforce to cry out, saying: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mt 27:46). This was the greatest desolation that he had

suffered in his life. And thus he wrought herein the greatest work that he had ever wrought, whether in miracles or in mighty works, during the whole of his life, either upon earth or in heaven, which was the reconciliation and union of mankind, through grace, with God.”\*

It was not until the twentieth century, wounded by the extermination camps and the gulags, gripped by atheism and extreme doubt, with a new awareness of the cry of the poor that rises from all over the earth, that theologians began to explore more deeply the meaning of that cry.†

Martin Heidegger, reflecting on the “death of God” proclaimed by Nietzsche, wrote about this troubled century: “The night of the world spreads its darkness. This era is characterized by the absence of God, the ‘disappearance of God.’ [...] Granted that there can be a turning point for this age, this can only happen if the world turns upside down, that is, upside down beginning from the abyss. In an epoch of the world’s dark night, the abyss must be experienced and suffered. But for this to happen, it is necessary that there are those who reach into the abyss.”‡

Jesus on the cross, abandoned by the one whom he had called “Abba, Father,” and thrust into the blackest night, tells us that at least he has reached into the abyss. Of course, there were those who

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\* *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 2, 7, 11, in *Opere*, Roma 1979, 92.

† For a deeper analysis, see the Forum, *Jesus’ abandonment, for a culture of unity*, in *Nuova Umanita* with articles by Giuseppe Maria Zanghi, Gerard Rosee, Piero Coda and Jesus Castellano Cervera, OCD.

‡ *Sentieri interrotti*, ed. it., Firenze 1982, 247–248.

believed, throughout history, that his “why have you forsaken me?” was nothing more than a verse from Psalm 22, recited by him as a dying prayer. But Biblical science tells us that those words are not randomly inserted in the story of Christ’s passion, but rather express its deepest meaning: Jesus did not remain a stranger to disgrace, but he experienced the abyss of nothingness and descended into the state of extreme remoteness from God.

Paul confirms this in his Letter to the Galatians when he does not hesitate to say that Christ was made “a curse for us,”\* and when, in Second Corinthians, he affirms that God “made him to be sin.”† Similarly, the Letter to the Hebrews declares that Jesus died “outside the camp,” that is, outside the enclosure of the Holy City and the scope of the Covenant: in the space of those without God (cf. Heb 13:12–13).‡

Great theologians of different churches have reflected on this reality. The Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, writes: “Jesus does experience the darkness of the sinful state, not in the same way as the (God-hating) sinner experiences it [...], but nonetheless in a deeper and darker experience. This is because it takes place in the profound

\* Cf Gal 3:13 “Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.” Cf. Deut 21:23 “hanging on a cross is a curse from God.” When death on the cross, Gerard Rosse observes, was inflicted in the name of the Law, it meant, based on Scripture, an act of repulsion and abandonment by God.

† Cf. 2 Cor 5:21: “For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”

‡ Cf. G. Rosse, *Maledetto l'appeso al legno. Lo scandalo della croce in Paolo e Marco*, Roma 2006.



depths of the relations between the divine *hypostases*, which is inconceivable to any creature. Thus it is just as possible to maintain that Jesus' being forsaken by God was the opposite of hell, as to say that it was hell or even the ultimate heightening of hell.”\*

In Orthodox circles, Sergei Bulgakov writes this about the abandonment of Jesus: “It is as if the inseparability of the Holy Trinity is disrupted; the Son is alone, and by this astonishing sacrifice of God, the ‘it is finished’ of the salvation of the world arrives. This is the divine death, for ‘my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;’ this is spiritual death, which is precisely forsakenness by God. The cup is drunk to the bottom and the Son commends his Spirit into the Father’s hands. The Divine Trinity is reunited into an inseparable unity.”†

In the Evangelical Lutheran perspective, Luther, distancing himself from Augustine, had already reiterated that the cry of Jesus was to be taken literally and not attenuated in its shocking reality. Theologians like Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer have also reflected deeply on the subject.

In the official teaching of the Catholic Church, John Paul II was the first to speak of Jesus' cry of abandonment reported by the evangelists. He writes in the apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris*: “One can say that these words on abandonment are born at the level of that inseparable union of the Son

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\* *Teodrammatica*, IV, Milano 1986, 313.

† Sergej Bulgakov, *L'Agnello di Dio*, Città Nuova, Rome, 1986, 433.

with the Father, and are born because the Father 'laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Is 53:6). They also foreshadow the words of Saint Paul: 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin' (2 Cor 5:21). Together with this horrible weight, encompassing the 'entire' evil of the turning away from God which is contained in sin, Christ, through the divine depth of his filial union with the Father, perceives in a humanly inexpressible way this suffering which is the separation, the rejection by the Father, the estrangement from God. But precisely through this suffering he accomplishes the Redemption, and can say as he breathes his last: 'It is finished' (John 19:30)" (n. 18)\*

The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, writes: "Jesus, the Word made flesh, has gone the farthest distance that a lost humanity is able to go. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Endless distance, limitless separation, wonder of love. Between God and God, between the Father and his Incarnate Son, our despair intervenes, with which Jesus shows solidarity until the end."†

Pope Francis spoke of the cry of abandonment in a spontaneous answer to young people: "But the greatest silence of God was on the cross: Jesus felt the Father's silence, calling it 'abandonment.' 'Father, why have you abandoned me?' And then there was the miracle of God, that word, that magnificent gesture which was the Resurrection. Our

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\* John Paul II spoke again about Jesus' abandonment in his Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 25–27.

† Via Crucis at the Colosseum, Rome, April 1, 1994.

God is also a God of silences and [...] I am not saying that we can ‘understand’ the silences of God, but we can come close to them by looking at Christ crucified, Christ who died, Christ abandoned...”\*

But how could the Son of God feel abandoned by the Father? How could the Father abandon the Son?

This is the mystery that Chiara Lubich encountered at the age of twenty-four on January 24, 1944. Her conclusion was disarming: “If at that moment he suffered the most, it means that at that moment he loved the most. Let’s make him the Ideal of our lives! Let’s go look for him and ‘console’ him wherever he is suffering—in any suffering. Let’s not run away from him but ‘embrace’ him in the many crosses of ours and other people’s lives. And let’s gather for him hearts that also start loving him.”

Far from a painful and sorrowful Christianity, this is a love story, full of surprises. This choice, carried out little by little, without reservations, brought forth light. Chiara first discovered the key to unity in Jesus Forsaken; then the “pupil of the Eye of God” through which he sees us and we can “see” him—a new vision of God and of all things. Finally, she recognized in the abandonment the intimate wound of the God-Man from which emanated the Holy Spirit who later, at Pentecost, descended on the newborn Church. It follows that he is really the secret of unity and the road to become an instrument of unity on a universal scale.

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\* Meeting with youth at Lungomare Caracciolo, Naples, March 21, 2015.

The consequences of these findings were multiple. Initially, they indicated to Chiara the challenging road to graft a dazzling and innovative charism into the Church, whose leaders did not immediately understand it, and to bring about a Work that is *Church*, a creature of the Church. Then, Jesus Forsaken became the reason to “go out” to face the most varied challenges of society and recognize his face on a grand scale, arousing love for him, who when lived, as much as possible with his measure, is a remedy and a response. Jesus Forsaken invited us to take upon ourselves any rift, laceration or division, patiently weaving a dialogue with others, without excluding anyone, including ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, as well as dialogue with non-believers and with all the various expressions of contemporary culture.

This is precisely how Chiara discovered Jesus Forsaken—“God who empties himself,” as Pope Francis says, referring to the words of Paul in Phil 2:7. Chiara sees him as the “God of today,” “the God of our time,” not the God of exclamation points, much less the God of imposition, but the God who welcomes, listens to, serves and takes upon himself every burden. Therefore, he is the God of people who do not hide behind their own security, but give of themselves to others, dare to make room for them, and build bridges in all directions in order to promote fraternity.

Finally, with Jesus Forsaken, Chiara descended into the “epochal night,” the collective dark night, as John Paul II clearly diagnosed it, and she lived it, in her own flesh, as the “night of God,” shoulder to

shoulder with millions of people living in the most unspeakable situations, as an indispensable step to spread what she one day called the “culture of the resurrection.”

Chiara spoke and “sang” of all this in her book *The Cry* published in 2000. She also recounted it with passion in the early 80s in the book, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken*. In the following pages, we retrace this path through letters of the “early days,” various little-known writings scattered in publications not easily accessible, meditations, journal notes, excerpts taken from talks directed to different audiences and from spiritual thoughts given during international conference calls, which initially occurred fortnightly and then monthly, and through which Chiara carried on, with tens of thousands of people all over the world, what she called the “Holy Journey.”\*

Through these first-hand testimonies, we will revisit the life and thought of Chiara from a particular perspective that is one of the main points of her spirituality,<sup>†</sup> actually one of its two main pillars, together with unity.

In chapter after chapter we will see a great love story unfold, increasingly far-reaching. The result will be an invitation to us to respond also to the cry

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\* A heartfelt thanks to the Chiara Lubich Center and to the many people who in different ways contributed to this book, which would not have been possible without them.

† This series of books is dedicated to the main points of the spirituality of unity, which Chiara also called “spirituality of communion,” in line with John Paul II’s thought expressed in his apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (cf. n. 43).

that bursts from within the God-Man and rises up globally from humankind. A cry that invokes love.

And since that cry embraces everyone, we conclude this introduction with the words attributed to the Muslim poet Saadi, who lived in thirteenth-century Persia:

“When I came into the world,  
life handed me a cup:  
I drank it all and found a pearl, youth.  
Youth gave me its cup  
and after drinking from it  
I found between my lips the ruby of love.  
Love offered me its cup, I drank also from it,  
and at the bottom there was the diamond of  
pain.  
Desperate, I drank to the last drop  
from the cup of pain,  
and with great amazement, I found God.”

Hubertus Blaumeiser

*“My God, my God, why have you  
forsaken me?”*

“When it was noon, darkness came over the whole  
land until three in the afternoon.  
At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice,  
‘*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*’ which means,  
‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’  
When some of the bystanders heard it, they said,  
‘Listen, he is calling for Elijah.’  
And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine,  
put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink,  
saying,  
‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take  
him down.’  
Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.  
And the curtain of the temple was torn in two,  
from top to bottom.  
Now when the centurion, who stood facing him,  
saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,  
“Truly this man was God’s Son!”

Mk 15:33–39

20-9-49.

Non me solo sono nella terra: Peri  
 Oltremontano: non ho altro Dio fuori  
 di Lui. In Lui è tutto il Paradiso della  
 Trinità e tutta la terra col'Umanità.

Perché il buo è mio e nell'altro.

È buo è il Dolore universale e quindi  
 mio.

Andrò nel mondo cercando lo in o-  
 gni attimo della mia vita.

Ciò che mi fa male è mio.

Mio il dolore che mi sfiora nel pre-  
 sente. Mio il dolore delle anime accanto  
 (è quello il mio Peri). Mio tutto ciò che  
 non è pace, gaudium, bello, amabile,  
 sereno... in una parola: ciò che non è  
 Paradiso. Perché quello io ho il mio Para-  
 diso me è quello nel cuore dello sporo  
 mio. Non ne conosco altri. Con per gli anni  
 che mi rinvergono: amata di dolori,  
 di angosce, di disperazioni, di malinconie,  
 di discepoli, di entio, di abbandoni, di  
 strazi, di... tutto ciò che è Lui e Lui è  
 il Peccato, e' mi fermo.

Con promiglierò l'acqua della tri-bola -  
 more in molti cuori vicini e per la come =

more sulla sporo mio onnipotente -  
 Contati.

Parerò come Fuoco che consuma  
 ciò che ha da cadere e lascia in piedi  
 solo la Verità.

ma occorre esser come Lui: esser  
Lui nel momento presente della vita.



## I have only one Spouse on earth

The text presented in this page is one of Chiara Lubich's most famous writings: a love letter to Jesus Forsaken, composed after the extraordinary experience of God and of his Light during the summer of 1949. It is a lifetime program.

September 20, 1949<sup>1</sup>

I have only one Spouse on earth: Jesus Forsaken.  
I have no other God but him.

In him there is the whole of paradise with the Trinity and the whole of the earth with Humanity.

Therefore what is his is mine, and nothing else.

And his is universal Pain, and therefore mine.

I will go through the world seeking him in every instant of my life.

What hurts me is *mine*.

Mine the pain that grazes me in the present.  
Mine the pain of the souls beside me (that is my Jesus).

Mine all that is not peace, joy, beautiful, lovable, serene...in a word, what is not Paradise. Because I too have my Paradise, but it is that in my Spouse's heart. I know no other.

So it will be for the years I have left: athirst for pain, for anguish, for despair, for sadness, for

## Jesus Forsaken

separation, for exile, for forsakenness, for torment, for...all that is him, and he is Sin, Hell.

In this way I will dry up the waters of tribulation in many hearts nearby and, through communion with my almighty Spouse, in many far away.

I shall pass as a Fire that consumes all that must fall and leaves standing only the Truth. But it is necessary to be *like* him: to be him in the present moment of life.

## To Reunite Us All With the Father

Taken from “A Little Harmless Manifesto”

Trent, 1950<sup>2</sup>

We knew Christ Crucified and nothing else.

To be crucified with him in the divine will and often with him crucified in our neighbor was the most beautiful expression of our love for the Father. “So that the world may believe...” (Jn 17:21)

We fixed our gaze on him and realized that the great saints filled their souls with God by loving the cross. We wanted to do the same. We knew we had only one life, and a brief one at that, so we wanted to spend it in the best possible way.

One day we asked ourselves what was the greatest suffering of Jesus on the cross and it seemed to us that it was that cry, uttered after three hours of agony, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (cf Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). It is like the swan song of the God-Man who had poured out everything of himself for his brothers and sisters.

He had given everything.

First, a life lived beside Mary in hardship, obedience and dedication.