

**INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
FOR STUDENTS AND YOUNG PROFESSIONALS**

Law in search of Justice
“*Giovani giuristi in dialogo*”

*Maria Emmaus Voce
President of the Focolare Movement*

Dearest young people, I am very happy to be with you for your first worldwide meeting! I really appreciate the theme that you have chosen to explore: law in search of justice in relationships among people and in social life.

You have also decided to use this Congress to exchange views with professionals in your future areas of legal practice who are already animated by the same desire to infuse law with justice. I heard that this exchange was very fruitful and has opened interesting new perspectives.

I hope you enjoyed this congress, and that it has been helpful in your search for knowledge and fulfilling aspirations for your life. I greet you in my own name and also on behalf of the whole Focolare Movement, which is hosting this conference and has been happy to put at your disposal this hall and its resources, including its specific vision of promoting relationships of true communion between people and among institutions. In particular, the Focolare is happy to offer the experience of the Communion and Law project, which over the years has brought together legal academics and professionals for reflection and for common projects.

Like you, I also chose - many years ago - to study law and I practiced for some years as a lawyer. I remember my first client and feeling afraid that I might not be able to meet the expectations of the task before me. Then, suddenly, the certitude that I had to do only one thing: listen with love, give advice out of love, be a lawyer out of love.

But, if a lawyer is called to defend the interests of the client against another's interest, often the case may become tenser, divisions emerge, and one can easily reach a point where ferocious and interminable arguments create a chasm among people and families.

So, I developed a method of not rushing to trial even when the client was pushing in this direction. Instead, I would ask the client to take some time for reflection. Usually, when the client returned, we were able to see things with more objectivity and to weigh the advantages or disadvantages, material, psychological and moral, of going to trial. Most of the time, the matter was resolved in my office with a cup of coffee and a sign of reconciliation between the parties. This is a little of my own story as a practicing lawyer.

A few years after I began working as a lawyer, I decided to orient my life toward putting into practice and spreading the new charism of unity brought to humanity by Chiara Lubich and through the Focolare Movement which she founded. I left legal practice so as to be completely at the service of the movement. I have lived in various

places throughout the world, including Istanbul, where I helped to foster the Focolare's relationship with the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople.

When I returned to Italy about 15 years ago, I had the surprise of taking up again my legal studies. In fact, Chiara had called me to be a part of the Movement's Study Center, focused on this discipline.

Exploring the role of law as the rule of social relationships in the light of Chiara Lubich's spirituality, I received a confirmation that loving the other is the key to respect for all laws. Living love for God and love of neighbor brings one to respect civil laws and also to interpret and apply them in a way consistent with justice, as you have been exploring during this meeting. In this way, one can reach true justice, which is to recognize what is "his" or "hers" by dignity and right for each person - but which is also able to assume the corresponding duties. A society cannot live without people fulfilling their duties of respect and fraternity toward all.

Thus, through relationships lived in the spirit of fraternity between persons, peoples and institutions, humanity can become a family of true brothers and sisters. While addressing a group of jurists, John Paul II once said: "The establishment of universal brotherhood certainly cannot be the result of jurists' efforts alone, but their contribution to the accomplishment of this task is specific and indispensable. It is part of their responsibility and their mission."

With this vision, the project "Communion and Law of the Focolare Movement" that I mentioned earlier, fosters dialogue with the legal culture in academic environments and in environments for the administration of justice and in public administration generally. It aims to foster universal brother and sisterhood, in such a way that both the doctrine and application of law may fulfill their function to serve human dignity and love among people, a more united world.

Dearest young people, what else to hope for you?

I would add: courage! The challenges ahead of you are many, some you already have faced them during this Congress and many others will surface. One thing is certain: the field of law and justice is in great need of generous people who are open to the ideal of unity of the human family and who put all of themselves into it, to heal each relationship, without fear and without compromise.

Your task is immense, but I assure you that from our part, and from the part of our friends in the Communion and Law project you can count on our closeness to you and our support. Alone, it would be difficult to permeate our society with the values of respect, brotherhood and love, but together we can reach our goal.

Castelgondolfo, March 1, 2009