

The Mystical Theology of Chiara Lubich

A Foundation for Interreligious Dialogue in East Asia

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In the third and final section, Mitchell presents his views on how such a dialogue could contribute to a more global Catholic philosophy.¹

Chiara Lubich's Spirituality and Interreligious Dialogue

Chiara Lubich understood that the cry of Jesus crucified, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46) was intimately related to Jesus’s last prayer, “May they all be one” (Jn. 17:21). At the moment of his cry on the Cross, Jesus experienced the separation of humankind from God in order to fill that gap and reunite us as one human family in God. His prayer for the oneness of humanity suffering from cultural, racial, political, religious, and personal divisions of all kinds found its answer in the cry of forsakenness. Chiara’s spirituality is based on a spiritual union with Jesus Forsaken for the healing of divisions and on a unity of humankind that reflects the unity of the Trinity. Human beings living the Trinitarian life as much as possible is the core of Chiara’s spirituality. In the words of Piero Coda, her spirituality is based on “the existential understanding, in light of Jesus Forsaken, of the Trinitarian love between the Father and the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit.”²

The *kenosis* (self-emptying) of Jesus on the Cross, as presented in Philippians 2:7, is not only a kenotic love for humankind bringing a new unity to the human family. It is also a self-revelation of the inner Trinitarian *kenosis* of mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*).

1. A version of this article was published in *Fu Jen International Religious Studies* 7 (2013): 1–20.

2. Piero Coda, “Introduction,” Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2007), xix.

This article begins with the assumption that Chiara Lubich received a charism—a spiritual gift—that is embodied in her spirituality of unity. Mitchell argues that the Trinitarian source of this gift was revealed in the mystical experience she refers to as “Paradise ’49,” a period of illumination in Chiara’s life that began in 1949 and extended to 1951. The first part of this paper reflects on the charism of Chiara’s spirituality of unity as lived out in interreligious dialogue. The second part reflects on what has been published about Chiara’s mystical illuminations, which Mitchell believes can serve as new sources for dialogue with the East Asian traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism.

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This fact would become clear to Chiara during her mystical illuminations in Paradise '49, which we will discuss later. For now, it is important to note that her spirituality of unity, which is based on this kind of kenotic love and perichoretic unity, animates the interreligious dialogues of the Focolare Movement.

The loving dialogical dynamism of Chiara's relational charism with its thrust toward unity could not be contained within the Catholic Church alone. Chiara describes her first realization of this fact during an encounter in 1966:

The first major experience we had with brothers and sisters of other religious faiths was with the Bangwa, a tribe in the Cameroons, which follows a traditional religion. . . . One day the king, the Fon, and thousands of his people were gathered in a large clearing in the middle of the forest for a celebration in which they offered us their songs and dances. All at once, I had a strong impression of God, like a huge Sun, embracing all of us, we and they, with his love. For the first time in my life, I intuited that soon we would be involved also with people of non-Christian traditions.³

The event that formalized this involvement and dialogue took place in 1977 in London, when Chiara was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Chiara notes:

I gave a talk and when I was leaving the hall, the first to greet me were Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus.

3. Chiara Lubich, "The Focolare Movement's Experience of Interreligious Dialogue," *Essential Writings*, 344.

. . . It was clear to me that we needed to be involved not just with our own and other churches, but also with these brothers and sisters of other faiths. So began our interreligious dialogue.⁴

In the years after that event, Chiara traveled the world in dialogue with Muslims from North Africa to New York City, with Jewish leaders from Israel to Argentina, with Hindus in India, and Buddhists in East Asia. In all of these encounters, she modeled the way of dialogue that derives from her spirituality. She followed the example of Jesus Forsaken by stripping away all the riches of her own tradition in a *kenosis* of love that made herself one with all she met. She entered their worlds, their hearts and minds, and found brothers and sisters, fellow pilgrims in the religious life. She found herself enriched by the deep realities of other religions and would reflect on how what she found related to her personal experiences. She was fascinated with the similarities while always stressing the unity that is possible even with differences. For example, here is Chiara's description of her experience of being in dialogue with Jewish leaders in Argentina:

First there is a desire to get to know you . . . and begin a relationship with you precisely as brothers and sisters. . . . This is what happens when after a long time, brothers and sisters meet again and discover they are brothers and sisters; they love one another. . . . Could it not be that the Lord is beginning to manifest his will clearly that we establish a fraternal relationship among us . . . and offering through our

4. Ibid.

profound communion, through our working together, fresh hope to the world.⁵

About the process of discovering our brothers and sisters in other religions through dialogue, of loving each other in fraternal relationships, and of building a communion and working together to give hope to the world, Chiara writes:

It brings together, like a real family, people of different languages, races, cultures, nations and also faiths . . . in order to build fraternity among all . . . [with a] vision of all humanity as one family. . . .

It requires that we “make ourselves one” with others, that “we live the others” in a certain way, that we share their sufferings, their joys, in order to understand them to serve and help them in an effective, practical way. . . .

It demands that we empty ourselves completely, that we put aside from our minds our ideas, from our hearts our affections, from our wills everything we would want to do, in order to identify with the other person.

It is a matter of momentarily putting aside even the most beautiful and greatest things we have: our own faith, our own convictions, in order to be “nothing” in front of the other persons, a “nothingness of love.” By doing so we put ourselves in an attitude of learning, and in reality we always do have something to learn. . . . We enter their world,

in some way we become inculturated in them and we are enriched. This attitude enables us to contribute to making our multicultural societies become intercultural, that is, made up of cultures open to one another and in a profound dialogue of love with one another. . . .

Real, true, heart-felt fraternity is, in fact, the fruit of a love capable of making itself dialogue, relationship, that is, a love that, far from arrogantly closing itself within its own boundaries, opens itself toward others and works together with all people of goodwill in order to build together unity and peace in the world.⁶

“Love capable of making itself dialogue!” The kind of love that Chiara sees as having this capacity is kenotic love, the love of Jesus Forsaken who gave up all to become one with all in order to realize the prayer he made to his Father, “that they all be one.” It is Jesus Forsaken in the heart of Chiara as her spiritual spouse who is not only a model for dialogue but also is *love making itself dialogue*. Therefore, this love can achieve the answer to Jesus’s prayer: unity. Again in Chiara’s words, the goal is “that of restoring unity to the human family, because the Holy Spirit is present and active in some way in every religion, and not just in the individual members, but also within the religious tradition itself.”⁷

Persons of different religions who are in dialogue with the Focolare Movement often say that the unity they find through this dialogue of life makes them better Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, and so on. One Jewish leader in the United States said that

6. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, “With the World Religions,” 338–41.

7. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, “The Focolare Movement’s Experience of Interreligious Dialogue,” 347.

5. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, “With our Elder Brothers,” 333–34.

the loving fellowship at a Focolare center in Rome gave her a deep sense that she was living the spirit of the Sabbath as she would at home. A Tibetan Buddhist leader visiting a Focolare center in Los Angeles said that he “felt at home.” A Muslim woman from the Philippines who had been traveling for some time said with a deep sigh upon sitting down on a chair at the Chicago Focolare center, “Now I feel I am home again.” Once when I was eating dinner with a group of Hindus visiting the Focolare in Italy, there was a long silence and then the elder said, “I feel the presence of God here.” All the other Hindus in the group nodded.

This kind of “homecoming” experience goes both ways. To a Muslim’s question about what establishing relationships with people of other religions was like, Chiara responded:

I have always felt very comfortable! Because even if our religions are different we have much in common and this unites us. . . . Therefore, I am happy for two reasons: because I come to know new things and enter into another’s culture; but also because I come to know brothers and sisters who are the same as me insofar as we believe in so many of the same things.⁸

When asked to say more about what she “feels” when she is with a brother or sister of another religion, Chiara said: “I feel a great desire to relate with them as with members of the same family, to enter immediately into a fraternal relationship, to make unity. . . . I feel that there is a pre-existing bond that was there already.”⁹

8. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, “With Muslims,” 349.

9. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 350, 354.

Feeling “comfortable,” “at home,” like “brothers and sisters,” like “family,” like there is a “pre-existing bond”—these feelings are for Chiara the work of the Holy Spirit bringing to earth a taste of the Trinitarian life. Chiara’s charism lived out in dialogue brings something of this spiritual reality to people of all religions. In experiencing it, people of other religions do not lose their diverse identities but find a unity that embraces the diversity of brothers and sisters. Christians do not lose their identity but find it set within a broader horizon, like under the “huge Sun” Chiara experienced that embraced everyone in the jungle of the Republic of Cameroon.

I think that this life of dialogue, based on the charism given to Chiara for the good of the church and the world, represents two paradigm shifts. The first shift is away from the primacy of a religiosity that focuses on the individual and his or her own religious practice. Such an individual religiosity stresses the personal devotional aspects of a particular religion that take place within a church, monastery, ashram, mosque, synagogue, at home, or in a retreat or pilgrimage setting. For Chiara, this aspect remains necessary but insufficient. In line with Vatican II, she stresses the importance of a balance between the personal and the communal, which she does not see as competing sides of religious life. In fact, she would often say that by living in deeper communion with others and following the model of the Trinity as best we can, we will find that our personal spiritual life has deepened within us. And prayer, meditation, devotion, and scripture can strengthen the basis for our unity with others.

The second paradigm shift is away from a vision of one’s religion as an enclosed home with locked doors and toward that of an open journey where we find fellow pilgrims of different religions and

cultures. This is the path where true dialogue takes place, where we discover we have a bond that unites us as brothers and sisters, and where we are comfortable and at home with each other. In this journey, we can dialogue more deeply, share the treasures of our traditions, build a greater unity, and collaborate for peace and justice in our world. Chiara would say that our world is experiencing a cultural “dark night” involving a fragmentation into different tribes, even within the same religion, that do not listen to but turn to violence against each other. As John Paul II said, this is an evil with a capital “E.” We need dialogue to open the hearts and minds of humankind to our spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood, to a life of unity and peace.

Chiara relates this experience of a cultural dark night to the time of St. Augustine.¹⁰ People from the North and the East were migrating to Europe, and the Roman Empire was falling into division and chaos. Augustine had the grace to see that the hatred and violence of that time was not the end of the world but the birth pains of a new world. Today, the way forward into a new and more united and peaceful global culture is dialogue. This is one reason that those of us who are academics in the Focolare Movement have founded a new journal, *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture*.¹¹ We believe that fraternal dialogue can contribute the clarity needed to build a culture of unity.

Chiara Lubich’s Mystical Insights, East Asian Buddhism, and Confucianism

In this section, I will discuss what I see as possible future points for dialogue between four East Asian religious and philosophical

traditions and the mystical thought of Chiara Lubich. The first is the tradition of Emptiness, as presented in Mahayana thought beginning in India and becoming a foundation of East Asian Buddhism in general. The second is the Mahayana tradition’s identity of samsara and Nirvana, suffering existence and nirvanic liberation, which also emerged in India and then became foundational to Buddhism in East Asia. The third is the notion of the interpenetration and mutual indwelling of all things, as developed in the Chinese Huayan tradition and considered by many to be the high point of East Asian Buddhist thought. Finally, the fourth is a set of notions presented by Zhu Xi in the Chinese Neo-Confucian tradition, which has had great influence in the rest of East Asia. In all four cases, I will point out both similarities and differences that can inform future dialogue.

Emptiness and Creation

The Mahayana Buddhist notion of Emptiness expands the Buddha’s teaching of the dependent arising of the universe in such a way that all beings are interrelated and “lack” or are “empty” of the independence we attribute to them. Emptiness is the matrix, the interconnected wholeness of life found in the penetrating insight of enlightened wisdom. When wisdom penetrates Emptiness, one discovers one’s true self, one’s Buddha-nature, and Emptiness empties out in one’s heart as compassion. One finds that all things are compassionately connected in a harmony from beginningless beginning to endless end.¹²

Chiara Lubich writes about her own mystical experience of creation and of nature during Paradise ’49:

10. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, “With World Religions,” 337.

11. See: www.Claritas-online.org

12. Donald W. Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 106-110.

I remember that during those days, nature seemed to me to be enveloped totally by the sun; it already was physically, but it seemed to me that an even stronger sun enveloped it, saturated it, so that the whole of nature appeared to me as being “in love.” I saw things, rivers, plants, meadows, grass as linked to one another by a bond of love in which each one had a meaning of love with regard to the others.¹³

On earth all is in a relation of love with all: each thing with each thing. It is necessary to be Love to find the golden thread that links beings.¹⁴

In a talk in 1999, Chiara elaborates on this experience:

When we arrived in the mountains . . . I felt that I could discern, because of a special grace from God, the presence of God beneath things. Because God is present, sustaining all things. Therefore, if the pine trees—which I saw—were golden by the sun, if the brooks flowed into the glimmering falls, if the daisies, other flowers and the sky were all decked in summer array, stronger than all this was the vision of a Sun beneath all creation. In a certain sense, I saw, I believe, God who supports, who upholds things. God was preparing me for what would happen. And the fact that God was beneath things meant that they were not as we see them; they were all linked to one another by love; all, so to speak, in

love with one another. So, if the brook flowed into the lake, it was out of love. If the pine tree stood high next to another pine tree, it was out of love.¹⁵

In a talk two years later, Chiara says that she and her companions felt a “fire” at the time she was experiencing God “beneath” creation:

This fire that we felt—which we never felt again afterwards—was also outside of us. So we saw, I saw and then I communicated it to the others who then saw it with me—we saw that beneath the things of the world, like the meadows, the stars, the sky, the flowers, the waterfalls, there was Someone who linked them all together, a light that linked everything: it was the presence of God in things.¹⁶

Chiara experienced a divine “Sun” or “Fire,” which she refers to as the love of God, that gives life to all beings through the Word of God. All things in creation exist together in an interrelatedness, in a “bond of love,” each being a gift for the others. This interrelatedness of all things expresses in creation “traces” of the Trinity. Chiara saw the cosmos as saturated with a divine love wherein all beings are linked. It is very interesting that Chiara, later commenting on this experience, saw a similarity between this Trinitarian vision of creation and the Buddhist understanding of the cosmos.¹⁷

13. Chiara Lubich, “Paradise ’49,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1 (2012): 7.

14. Quoted by Callan Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person According to the Mystical Experience of Chiara Lubich in the Paradise of ’49,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1 (2012): 30.

15. Chiara Lubich, Unpublished Talk at Castel Gandolfo, December 20, 1999.

16. Chiara Lubich, Unpublished Talk at Castel Gandolfo, February 23, 2001.

17. Chiara Lubich, Unpublished Talk to the Gen, December 20, 2003.

Chiara goes on in her talk to discuss how she experienced the relationality of creation:

During those days everything contributed to creating “Paradise” inside and outside of us, almost as if the elements, people and events themselves were actors in the divine drama that held our soul for a long time. It was as if one divine Wisdom ordered all things in ever new scenarios.¹⁸

In other words, her previous experience of the “bond of love” uniting all beings in creation was deepened as she experienced the luminous “divine Wisdom” bringing about the harmony or order in creation. In the “ever new scenarios” of creation, all beings that had been seen as, in essence, gifts for each other were seen as harmonized by divine Wisdom. While Buddhism penetrates the interdependence of Emptiness with a “perfection of wisdom,” Chiara’s mystical experience penetrates divine Wisdom as the very cause of the interrelated harmony of all things.

Concerning this harmony of creation, Chiara notes that Francis of Assisi did not call the sun his brother and the water his sister out of sentimentality but in order to capture the real unity of the universe: “And having discovered the Creator of all things who is the father of each one, he sees them all, though in different ways, related to one another.”¹⁹ Chiara also notes that from her Trinitarian vision, one sees “in this world everyone is at the center, because the law of everything is love.”²⁰ Here, Chiara is saying that since each being is fully a gift for all other beings, each is the center of

the cosmos and the receiver of the gifts of all entities in the cosmos. In other words, all beings affirm in kenotic love each being, making each the center of creation.²¹

Suffering and Peace

Related to the Buddhist notion of Emptiness is the Mahayana teaching that “samsara is Nirvana, Nirvana is samsara.” Seeing the suffering world through the perfection of wisdom discloses a nirvanic dimension. With our senses and ordinary mind, we see and experience samsara. But with enlightened wisdom, we discover a Higher Truth where one can live out the peace and compassion, joy and loving kindness of Nirvana in one’s daily life.²²

In some of Chiara’s writings from before 1949, she describes her experience of a supernatural love, peace, and joy found in the suffering world. For example, Chiara notes in a letter written in 1948:

This presence [Jesus Forsaken] . . . very soon becomes *felt*, so that throwing ourselves into a sea of suffering we discover ourselves in a sea of love, of complete joy . . . and the soul feels itself refilled with the Holy Spirit, who is joy, peace, serenity.²³

In another letter, Chiara refers to this experience as a movement “beyond the wound”:

21. For a comparative essay on this aspect of Chiara’s experience of creation, see Donald W. Mitchell, “The Trinity and Buddhist Cosmology,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 18 (1998): 169–80.

22. Mitchell, *Buddhism*, 139–46.

23. Chiara Lubich, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken* (New York: New City Press, 1985), 67–68.

18. Ibid.

19. Marisa Cerini, *God Who is Love: In the Experience and Thought of Chiara Lubich* (New York: New City Press, 1992), 64–65.

20. Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 65.

that is having embraced Jesus forsaken totally, so that we found ourselves beyond pain, in love we felt like we were contemplating the immense love which God has poured out over the world . . . we were merged with love and shared in its light: the light of Love.²⁴

Chiara describes this experience as “a sort of Easter,” a “Passover” that seemed to her like “the triumphal entry of God” into the soul.²⁵

These two letters indicate experiences that are similar to the Buddhist view that the discovery of Emptiness entails “Emptiness emptying out as the Great Compassion.” In this discovery, one finds that Nirvana is samsara and that unmovable peace is found in the sea of suffering. For Chiara, this kind of Passover of the mind and heart from suffering into the freedom of love, peace, and joy is due to the sea of love that is God’s embracement of creation. To explain the Trinitarian source of the sea of love, Chiara and the Abba School, like in Buddhism, use the philosophical categories of “being” and “nonbeing.” For example, Chiara says in two places:

Love is not only an attribute of God: it is his very Being. And because he is Love, God is One and Triune at the same time: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . . . The Father generates the Son out of love; he loses himself in the Son, he lives in him; in a certain sense he makes himself “non-being” out of love, and for this very reason, he *is*, he is Father. The Son,

as echo of the Father, out of love turns to him, he loses himself in the Father, he lives in him, and in a certain sense he makes himself “non-being” out of love; and for this very reason, he *is*, he is the Son. The Holy Spirit, since he is the mutual love between the Father and the Son, their bond of unity, in a certain sense he also makes himself “nonbeing” out of love; and for this very reason, he *is*; he is the Holy Spirit. He is the “emptiness of love” in which the Father and Son are one.

If we consider the Son in the Father, we must think of the Son as a nothingness (a nothingness of love) in order to think of God as One. And if we consider the Father in the Son, we must think of the Father as a nothingness (a nothingness of love) in order to think of God as One. There are three in the Most Holy Trinity, and yet they are One because Love is not and is at the same time. . . . Each one is complete by not-being, indwelling fully in the others, in an eternal self-giving. . . . Herein lies the dynamics of life within the Trinity, which is revealed to us as unconditional, reciprocal self-giving, as mutual loving, self-emptying out of love, as total and eternal communion.²⁶

We are here reminded of another Buddhist notion, namely, “Emptiness as non-being empties out as Wondrous Being.” For Chiara, it is the Trinitarian nonbeing of love that “pours over the world” a sea of peace and joy in which we find Wondrous Being.

24. Lubich, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken*, 70–71.
25. Lubich, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken*, 69.
26. Piero Coda, “The Experience and Understanding of the Faith in God-Trinity from Saint Augustine to Chiara Lubich,” *New Humanity Review* 15 (2010): 37–38. Translated from Piero Coda “L’esperienza e l’intelligenza della fede in Dio Trinita’ da Sant’Agostino a Chiara Lubich,” *Nuova Umanita* 167 (2006): 527–52.

Mutual Penetration and Mutual Indwelling

In the Chinese tradition of Huayan Buddhism, there is a profound notion concerning the relation between particular things in the world. Phenomena “mutually interpenetrate” so as to be present within each other in a kind of “mutual containment.” This does not mean all things are physically present in other things; the metaphor used by the Huayan Master Fazang is a mirror containing the reflections of other mirrors. This “mutual indwelling” of things does not destroy their freedom. Rather the matrix of this mutual penetration is called “the realm of the non-obstruction between phenomena.” To discover this realm enables one to “enter” and “identify” himself or herself with all things in the universe while not obstructing freedom and personal uniqueness.²⁷

For Chiara, Trinitarian experience involves the mutual indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity and a reflection of that mutual indwelling among all things. This reality can be realized by those who live the life of unity by emptying themselves though a nonbeing of love into the lives of others. Chiara’s Trinitarian experience of mutual indwelling is only now being published by the Abba School.²⁸ For example, in a recent article, Anna Pelli, a member of the Abba School, quotes Chiara’s unpublished writing in which she uses a Huayan-like metaphor of a mirror to explain mutual indwelling:

It happens as in those mirrors that, looking at one another, project themselves infinitely into one another and re-contain

27. Mitchell, *Buddhism*, 213–19. Cf. Donald W. Mitchell, “The Trinity and Buddhist Cosmology,” 169–82.

28. The best source in English so far for this aspect of Chiara’s experience is an above-quoted article by Callan Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person According to the Mystical Experience of Chiara Lubich in the Paradise of ’49,” 24–45.

themselves through the reflection that returns. . . . Each particular, then, even though distinct from the others, contains in itself the universal. And since the all, the universal in itself is unity, each particular in itself is “a harmony = a *unity*,” and in unity is composed “the harmony of harmonies.”²⁹

Pelli reflects on this statement in the following way:

Mutual indwelling of subjects, *according to the pattern of the Trinity* . . . leads to refinding oneself in a mirror-like presence of otherness, in a being-more that does not simply exceed these things . . . but that, while it contains them, is, at the same time, contained by them. . . . The individual is the whole, the whole is the individuals. In other words, each one (the particular, the finite) . . . bears in itself the reality of the all, of the one.³⁰

The basis of Chiara’s thought here is her experience of the divine ideas in the Word. The ideas of all particulars in creation preexist in the Word of God as ideas in the Idea, words within the Word, *logoi* within *Logos*. They are uncreated without the limitations of material, created things—the eternal form of each thing in creation. In the process of creation, they change their ontological state and take on the limitations of finitude. Chiara says:

When God created, He created all things from nothing because He created them from Himself: from nothing

29. Anna Pelli, “Going from the Pact to the Soul: Exploring a Metaphysical Journey,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 2 (2013): 17, 20.

30. Pelli, “Going from the Pact to the Soul,” 19.

signifies that they did not pre-exist because He alone pre-existed. . . . He drew them out from Himself. . . . The Father projects them—as with divergent rays—“outside Himself,” that is, in a different and new, created dimension, in which he gives them “the Order that is Life and Love and Truth.” Therefore, in them there is the stamp of the Uncreated, of the Trinity.³¹

In explaining this notion of creation, Callan Slipper says the following:

In creating . . . the Father, looking at the Son, gives himself, giving his being by participation to the ideas-words (the “words in the Word”), and in that way “clothing” that which is not, the nothing, with his being, the very being of God. Created *things in themselves are not and remain nothing*, but they have being insofar as it *is given to them by participation*.³²

All created things are united to the Word who contains all the ideas-words united in himself. This unity with the Word that contains all things as ideas and as created particulars of those ideas means that each thing contains all other things; thus the mutual indwelling of creation. Slipper notes, “A specific created thing, therefore, inasmuch as it is an expression of a word in the Word, contains the stars, the mountains, the animals, and all human beings.”³³ Here we see a mutual indwelling of particulars similar to that of Huayan.

31. Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person,” 27.

32. Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person,” 28.

33. Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person,” 29.

For Chiara, while human beings have in relation to the divine ideas all the characteristics of other created things, they are distinct in their unique relation to the Word. The Word became a human, Jesus. So, humans have the capacity to express the whole Word-Jesus, not just the divine idea of themselves. In other words, while the divine ideas in the Word provide the model for other creatures, it is Jesus the Word who provides the model for human beings and the basis for our potential relational unity.³⁴ Chiara says:

Looking at two fir trees in unity gives an idea of the model fir tree. And here is the Gospel of nature. Where two fir trees are united, there is the idea of the model fir tree.

Just as where two human beings are united in the name of Jesus there is Jesus; because Jesus is the model for human beings: he is the Human Being. And it is enough to have two or more for his Idea to be present.³⁵

The Principles in Taiji and the Divine Ideas in the Word

How does all this relate to Confucianism? Here, I want to present a continuation of what has been discussed above as it relates to the philosophy of Zhu Xi, perhaps the greatest of the Neo-Confucian thinkers. Zhu Xi posits certain “principles,” “forms,” or “laws” (*li*) that exist “above shapes” and “within shapes.” Within shapes or things, these formative principles or ordering laws constitute the

34. For Chiara, this last fact, that Jesus is the basis for human mutuality-unity, is experienced as Jesus present and making them one, what Chiara called Jesus in the midst.

35. Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person,” 43.

nature of a thing. But before they are within a thing, they exist beyond the physical universe. They exist in ultimate reality, *Taiji*. In the creation of a thing, the formative principles become immanent in the individuals, and so does *Taiji*. The latter is said to be like the whole moon shining in a lake or a drop of water. Also present in *Taiji* is the source of materiality, called *qi*, which the principles form into things. Zhu Xi sees this process as a kind of “condensation” of *qi* in accordance with the eternal principles, *li*. Finally, these principles determine not only the nature of things but also their proper relationships. They include principles of moral behavior, the root of all virtues being “humanheartedness” (*ren*).

We can see similarities between Zhu Xi’s philosophy of principles (*li*) and Chiara’s mystical insights about the divine ideas. Cerini writes about Chiara’s Trinitarian vision: “[Chiara perceived] the ‘trinitarian mark of the Creator’ which is present in the entire universe in the vital interrelationships of the basic elements that constitute it.”³⁶ Cerini then provides an example of what Chiara meant by “basic elements,” namely, matter, order, and life.³⁷ Matter is the result of the Trinitarian Love of the Father in the creative act. It is like the *qi* condensing as matter from *Taiji*. The act of creation is through the Word that contains the divine ideas of God, the “forms” that, like *li*, order and provide laws for the created material things of the cosmos. Life is the result of the matter the Father creates, the ordering forms of things found in the Son, the Word, and their unity in the life-giving Holy Spirit.

Similarly, for Zhu Xi, the ordering principles (*li*) and the source of matter (*qi*) are both in *Taiji*. For Chiara, matter and order do

36. Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 62.

37. Chiara’s words during Paradise ’49 are “In Heaven, I understood that created nature has the stamp of the Trinity. Matter is like the Father; the Law is like the Word; Life is like the Holy Spirit.”

not exist apart from each other, just as the Father who originates matter and the Word who orders matter do not exist apart from each other. Life is a consequence of the unity of matter and ordering laws (forms). Here, Cerini says, even the very elements of creation are a “reflection” of the unity/distinction of the Trinity. Slipper describes this understanding of the elements of creation in this way:

Creation has being because the only being is that of the divine, that comes from the source that is the Father. It has law (or form) because the ideas-words, that give the law (or form) to things, remain in the Word, that is in the mind of God. Creation has life because the relating of things to one another, that is the result of the meeting of their being with their law (or form), is sharing in the One who constitutes the eternal meeting between the source of being and the Word . . . that is, the Holy Spirit.³⁸

Cerini calls matter “the mysterious expansion of the free self-giving of Trinitarian Love ‘outside’” of the Trinity in the creative act in space and time.³⁹ Matter is formed by the divine ideas in the Word of God both in what material things are and how they relate:

Being, made visible through the universe . . . is what Chiara highlights when she recognizes that love is the essence of all things: of the uncreated, of the created, *and* [italics mine] of the very relationships between the uncreated and the

38. Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person,” 29.

39. Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 62.

created. . . . God-Love sustains all things by his continuous creative act. He orders and moves them in a wondrous unity that preserves distinction, not only between the uncreated and the created, but among all things themselves.⁴⁰

Chiara understood that when persons realize this reality,

They discover the divine plan which God “designed for us and for our brothers and sisters, where everything falls into a splendid scheme of love,” where “a mysterious bond of love links persons and things, guides history, orders the destiny of peoples and individuals, while respecting their freedom to the full.”⁴¹

Or in Chiara’s words from her experience of Paradise ’49, “the whole of humanity therefore—*and in humanity the cosmos* [italics mine]—[are] eternally present in the Word, . . . which is in the bosom of the Father . . . the starting point and, so to say, the ultimate end of all divine creative action.”⁴²

Since the divine ideas of all creation and their relationships have eternally been present and united by Love in the Word, when one is *in* unity with others, he or she discovers himself or herself to be *gift for* others in creation. He or she also discovers his or her true personhood as uniquely created by God as a distinct gift for all others. Chiara wrote during Paradise ’49, “I felt that I have been created as a gift for the person next to me and that person next to me has been created by God as a gift for me. Just as the

Father in the Trinity is everything for the Son and the Son is everything for the Father.”⁴³

This realization opens one to a deeper understanding of the moral and social life to which we are called based on the love present in each person, like the “seed of humanheartedness,” to use Meng Zi’s notion, that makes us gift for the other. This being a gift of love for others is the basis for what Cerini calls the “horizontal *perichoresis*,” the ideal moral and social mutual indwelling that “reflects” the perichoresis of the Trinity. In this horizontal perichoresis, true and distinctive humanhearted or compassionate personhood is discovered, refined, and perfected. For Chiara, this is possible since the true identity of each person is already perfect in the Word and therefore in the perichoresis of the Trinity. One needs only to become existentially what he or she already is essentially. In Cerini’s words:

It is possible, therefore, to have a perichoresis among [people], even though it is imperfect, through the vertical perichoresis, so to speak, that exists between them and the Trinity by way of Christ in the Holy Spirit. . . . Unity among human persons “as” among the divine persons, can occur only in God. . . . Only God can produce it. It is his gift. That is why Jesus asks the Father for it: “That they may be [one] in us.”⁴⁴

I would add one final remark since I have raised the notion of a vertical *perichoresis* between persons and the Trinity. In Chiara’s

40. Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 63-64.

41. Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 65, quoting Chiara.

42. Slipper, 25.

43. Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 52. This passage is from the text of the Paradise dated September 2, 1949.

44. Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 51.

unpublished writings, she notes a number of times that all of creation flows out of God through the Word *and* that all of creation flows back into God through the Word. In both cases, there is an interrelatedness between all beings as they come forth from God, abide in creation together, and return together into God through the Word. In the Word after death, they are divinized, progressively becoming what they truly are in the mind and heart of God. All parts of creation are like rays of light diverging from the Word and then converging back—always in a relatedness of interdependence, love, and gift for each other.

Final Reflections on the Mystical Thought of Chiara Lubich as a Foundation for Future Interreligious Dialogue in East Asia

I believe it is clear that there are strong similarities between the mystical insights of Chiara Lubich and both the Buddhist and Confucianist traditions of East Asia. It also should be clear that there are differences as well. One question that Buddhism has addressed since its beginning in India is the question of causation. For example, what is it that makes the world a matrix of interdependence? Why is it this way and how does it come about? The typical answer is karma. Some Buddhist philosophers claim that karma does the work that in Christianity is deemed to be God's work. Certainly Chiara's Trinitarian experience was of an interrelatedness in nature that derived from a divine source: God's creative Love that through the Word brings the dynamic interdependent order or harmony of things as gifts for each other. The immanent horizontal *perichoresis* in creation is based on a transcendent vertical *perichoresis*. While Buddhists do not posit such a transcendent cause, there is here a foundation for future Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

The relationship between suffering and freedom, samsara and Nirvana, being and nonbeing is essential to both Buddhist epistemology and Buddhist ontology. Chiara's mystical experience of nonbeing in the very heart of the Trinity as eternal Love, and its being lived out by persons in their relationships following the model of Jesus Forsaken, touches on these issues in Buddhism. The discovery of peace, joy, and freedom in this mystery of the Cross resonates with the identity of samsara and Nirvana, but with a personal texture. This personal Trinitarian dimension of nonbeing and being presents another opportunity for in-depth dialogue.

A comparison of Chiara's experience of the mutual indwelling with Huayan's notion of mutual penetration and containment shows how the dialogue can be enriching in both directions. Certainly the "non-obstruction between phenomena" in the Huayan vision touches the mystery of a unity that preserves distinction and freedom. Many of the metaphors and terminology of Huayan can be rich resources for Christian Trinitarian theology. And Chiara's experience of the containment of the cosmos in all things can be a resource for Buddhists as well.

Finally, Christian dialogue with Confucianism often occurs at the level of ethics and social thought. Chiara's ontological insights into the Trinitarian aspects of the creative act—namely, matter, order, and life—however, provide a basis for a deeper interreligious conversation about the fundamental origin of the universe. Also, unlike Buddhism, the Neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi posits a transcendent reality that includes suggestive parallels to Chiara's experience of the divine ideas that determine the nature of things as well as moral relationships.

In short, I believe that as more of Chiara's mystical writings are published, we will find new horizons for the Catholic Church's dialogue with the religious traditions of East Asia. In so doing,

the philosophy of the church may find categories other than those received from the ancient Greeks, the scholastics, and modern European thought that promise to make the Church more global. Chiara's charism in the dialogue of life has built bridges of unity between peoples around the world, bringing them together in a "home" where all "feel comfortable." In that universal home, that "Focolare," we will have much to discuss for our mutual enrichment, understanding, and appreciation. This dialogue, I think, will contribute to a global culture of harmony, peace, and good will to all beings.

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